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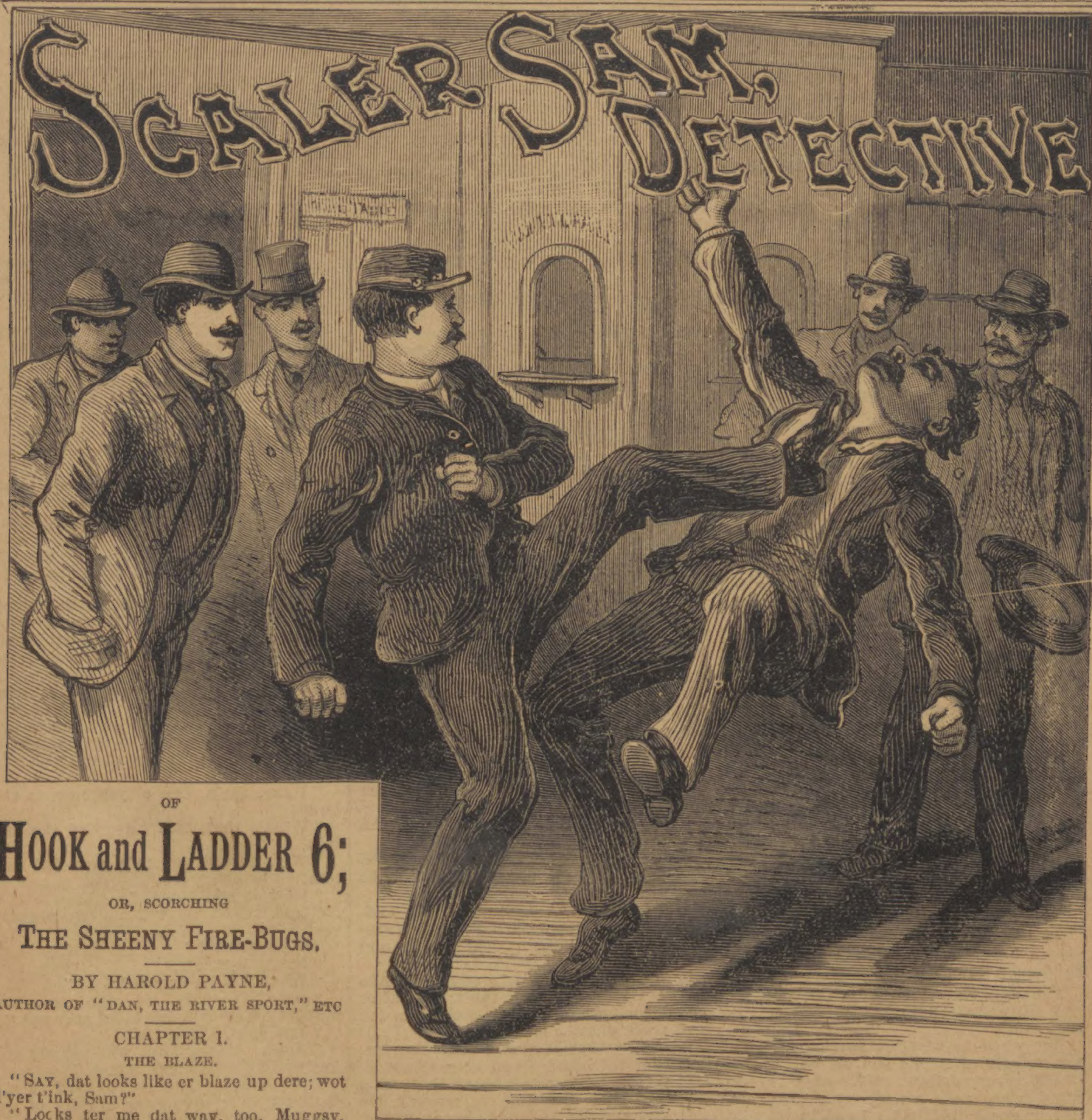
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OF HOOK and LADDER 6;

OR, SCORCHING

THE SHEENY FIRE-BUGS.

BY HAROLD PAYNE,

AUTHOR OF "DAN, THE RIVER SPORT," ETC

CHAPTER I.

THE BLAZE.

"SAY, dat looks like er blaze up dere; wot d'yer t'ink, Sam?"

"Locks ter me dat way, too, Muggsy. Guess I'll jes' scale dis post an' take er peep, see."

SCALER SAM MADE A HEROIC SPRING AND LANDED A VICIOUS KICK IN THE FIRE-BUG'S FACE.

"W'y don't yer up er cop, an' let im turn in er 'larm?"

"Oh, kos, I likes ter drop onter dese t'ings meself, see? Den de cap'n gives me credit, see?"

It was in one of the tumble-down rookeries in Thompson street.

The building was one of the old-time three-story bricks, with a wooden awning in front, and had been considered a pretty high-toned establishment in the old times.

It was looked upon by the old settlers, when this part of town was occupied by the "Four Hundred" of that day, as little short of palatial.

But since the street became overrun with negroes, the house, which was pretty well run down anyway, had fallen into disrepute, like all of its neighbors.

And now, since the Russian Jews, or "Sheenies," as they are known in New York, had come in and pushed the coons out, the old place had fallen lower than ever.

The house was occupied by a Russian Jew named Isaac Skrewbenschky, as a second-hand clothing store, and was filled to suffocation with all kinds of cast-off clothing.

This was on the first floor.

The two upper floors were occupied by something like a dozen poor Jewish families.

Incendiary fires had been of such frequent occurrence in the neighborhood since it became overrun with this class, that the Fire Department had at last decided to take extra precautions, and put extra watchmen on duty in the district.

But even this had not availed to stop the frequent outbreaks of fires, and at last it was decided to adopt a new method.

"Scaler Sam," as he was known, on account of his faculty for climbing anywhere and everywhere that a squirrel could climb, was a sort of protege, or adopted son, of No. Six Hook and Ladder, and he had long been known as possessing as keen a nose for the detective business as he did athletic limbs for scaling.

Nothing was known of Sam's parentage, and he had been picked up as a waif by one of the firemen, when a small boy.

The "fire-boys" had taken a fancy to the lad, and he had remained with them ever since.

By the time he had reached ten, he had already made a record for himself as a climber by scaling to a point where no fireman would dare to go, and as a detective, by smelling out a "fire-bug" after the police had come to the conclusion that the fire was accidental.

So, after the watchmen placed on duty in Thompson street and its vicinity had shown themselves incompetent to prevent the frequent fires set by the Sheeny fire-bugs for the purpose of collecting the insurance on the old rookeries of the neighborhood, the department had at last listened to the advice of the captain of No. 6, and put Sam on as a special detective.

Old Skrewbenschky had long been suspected of being a "fire-bug," and Sam had kept a particularly sharp eye on him.

Thus far, after a week on the post, he had discovered nothing to confirm his suspicions.

But when he saw the suspicious-looking volume of smoke pouring out of one of the upper windows of the rookery, his mind was made up at once that old Skrewbenschky had had a hand in it.

Sam had been standing on the corner for a minute or two, watching the smoke to determine whether it came from a

stove-pipe, or really was a fire, when his friend Mugsy Mullen came up.

Mugsy had no idea that his friend was a detective, but he knew he had a weakness for going to fires and a knack for discovering their cause, and this was why Mugsy was so quick at calling Sam's attention to the suspicious smoke.

As Sam concluded his remarks, he walked with an unconcerned look across the street, and, seeing no one about, suddenly commenced scaling one of the posts which supported the wooden awning.

A second later he had reached the shed roof.

He peeped in at one of the front windows.

The room into which he looked was deserted, although there was a good deal of wretched old furniture in the place.

This aroused Sam's suspicions, for he knew that ordinarily these rooms were crowded with women and children.

Trying one of the windows, he found that he could raise it.

Quickly hoisting the sash, he climbed in.

Then he made his way through the stacks of old clothing and musty furniture to a door which led into a narrow corridor, or hall.

From this a still narrower and very dirty stairway led to the floor above.

As soon as he reached the next floor he became almost suffocated with smoke.

When he reached the floor on the inside, he found that the smoke did not affect him so much, as it hung like a black cloud some distance above the floor.

This part of the house was also suspiciously deserted, and Sam groped his way along into the next room, from which the smoke seemed to come.

In another moment he had reached the next, which was the front room, and he reached it not a second too soon.

A lot of bed-clothing was piled on the floor, and, from the smell, he knew at once that it was saturated with kerosene.

The pile was smoking voluminously, and would burst out into a flame in another minute.

Suspended from the ceiling by a string directly over the smoking mass was a bladder.

This, his experience with these fire-bugs had led him to know, was filled with turpentine.

As soon as the smoking pile of rags should blaze up an explosion would follow, and in a minute the tinder-box of a house would be in flames.

There was not a second to be lost.

The instant he should touch them they would in all probability blaze up, the flame set off the turpentine in the bladder, and all would be lost in a twinkling.

The only thing to be done, then, was to contrive some plan to remove the bladder in time to avert the explosion.

He looked about, and at length ran across an old broom.

With this he swung the suspended bladder as far as possible from over the fire.

And then while holding it in this position, with his disengaged hand he dragged a chair in the proper place, and mounted it.

It was but the work of a second to take out his knife and sever the string, after which he carried the bladder into the next room out of reach of the fire.

Realizing that it would take the fire, now that the bladder had been removed, a long time to do much harm, the young detective took his time in making his way down-stairs, this time going by the way of the steps from the second story, instead of by the awning-post, as he had come.

When he reached the head of the last pair of stairs he discovered the door locked.

At that very instant the fire-alarm rang out, and in less than a minute several engines and ladder wagons were in front of the building.

Sam pounded and shook the door, but he soon found that egress in that direction was out of the question.

He rushed to the front of the house with a view to making his escape that way, but the firemen had already smashed in the window and were pouring such a sluice of water in that it was impossible to face the deluge.

Again he hastened back to the stair-door.

But he had no more than begun to surge at it again, than the door was smashed in by some heavy weight from without, and the next instant a burly policeman confronted the boy.

The cop was backed up by two or three more, who were unable to pass one another on the stairs.

As soon as the foremost cop espied Sam in the dim light with the bladder in his hand, he made a grab for the lad, growling:

"Ah, yer little shpalpeen, Oi've got yez! It's yerself, is it, as is doin' the foire-boogin' roun' here?"

"No, 'tain't, see?" muttered Sam, sullenly, although he could not help but see that he was in a hole for the present. "It wos me dat kep' de joint f'om scorchin', see?"

"Thot's a loikely story! We'll just see phwat the soorgent says about thot, me laddy-book. Kim an, ye Sheeny foire-boog!"

And with that he collared the boy and dragged him down the stairs, in spite of his vigorous protestations.

Sam's feelings were pretty well ruffled by this outrage, in the face of the invaluable services he had rendered. But as he walked away with the officer he regained something of his usual good-humor, and said:

"Wal, I've bin took fer er good many t'ings, but dis is der furs' time wot I was ever took fer er Sheeny fire-bug. Dat's right."

CHAPTER II.

A LAUGH ON THE COP.

In the excitement incident to putting out the insignificant fire, none of Sam's comrades had recognized their protege in the uncouth-looking lad who was being dragged away by the two big cops.

But the lad had no more than gone when Sam's chum, Mugsy, who had been keeping an eye on his friend's movements as far as possible, ran to the captain of No. 6, as soon as an opportunity offered, and called out:

"I say, cap'n, one o' yer boys is colared!"

"What's that, kid?" growled the captain.

"W'y, one o' yer pals wos jis' now pinched by er copper."

"How do you know?"

"Kos, I seen 'im wid me two peepers, see?"

"Who was it?"

"Scaler Sam, sir."

"What was he arrested for?"

"Dat's like axin' me who me gran'-mudder's step-dawter's hired gurl was."

"You don't know, then?"

"Nope. I seen Sam wid sumpin wot looked like er bladder, dough."

"Ah, I see. The lad has saved the building by removing the bladder of turpentine, and the stupid policeman has arrested him on suspicion of being a fire-bug. I must look after the poor chap at once."

"Yep. 'Less yer want 'im ter go ter de leektrykooshun cheer afore yer knows it, boss."

The captain lost no time in hurrying away to the station, with the irrepressible Mugsy at his heels.

The captain arrived at the station just as the policeman had made his charge, and the boy was about to be locked up.

"See here, sergeant!" called out the captain, as soon as he could get his breath. "What does this mean?"

The sergeant, recognizing the captain, said:

"Hullo, Captain Tucker! What brings you here?"

"This boy!" cried the captain, excitedly, pointing at Sam. "I want to know why he has been arrested!"

"The charge is being caught coming out of a burning house with a turpentine bladder."

"It's a lie!" roared the captain. "If this officer had not been a fool, he would have known that this boy is no other than Scaler Sam; that he was placed by the Fire Department in the district where the officer found him, and that he was in the discharge of his duties when the officer arrested him."

"That's a loikely fairy-story, sarg'n!" sneered the cop. "Phat was the kid doin' wid the bladdher av toorpentoin, yer anner?"

"He had removed it from the burning house," explained the captain, "in time to avert the explosion. Only for that we should not have been able to save the building."

"You are sure of this?"

"I know the boy was placed there for that purpose, and that he has already prevented several fires in other districts, and more than once discovered clues which led to the detection of the incendiaries."

"There has been a mistake made here, officer," observed the sergeant.

"Phwat mishtake kin th' be?" growled the stupid cop. "O! seen the kid comin' outen th' shanty wid th' bladdher, an' phwat moor der yez want?"

"I want a good deal more, sir. First of all, I shall take the evidence which I have already got, and discharge the boy, and the next thing I shall do will be to ask this fireman to prefer charges against you for willful false-arrest. Now, my boy, let me ask you a few questions."

"Fire away, as de target said to de gent wid er gun."

"How came you to go into the burning house?"

"De same as er bum goes inter er gin-mill—kos dere was sumpin' dere wot I wanted, see?"

"You suspected there was a fire, then?"

"W'en yer sees a gent smokin' er pipe, yer don't t'ink he's got 'er loaded wid ice, do yer?"

"Hardly. But why did you not either notify the occupants of the house, or have a policeman send in a fire-alarm?"

"Ter answer yer fus' question fus', as de gent said w'en de dood axed 'im fer his dawter, an' den axed 'im fer er loan of er plunk, an' de gent kicked der dood down-stairs, de reason wot I didn't notify der occypants o' de joint wos dat I 'spected dem same whiskerses as bein' complicated in the conglomerashun—"

"The conflagration, you mean?"

"Wal, mebbey youse knows more 'bout it dan I does, boss," muttered Sam, "but if youse'd bin in dat joint as I wos, youse'd say conglomeration. Dat's right."

"I guess the boy is not far from right," laughed the captain.

"But you might have had an officer

send an alarm in," persisted the sergeant.

"Dere wosn't no time fer dat," answered the boy.

"Why not?"

"Kos, bein' dead onter dese fire-bugses' lay, I know'd dere'd be er bladder loaded wid turpentine summers 'bout the ranch, an' I know'd dat 'slong as der wos er fire sizzlin' onder dat, dere wosn't goin' ter be no peace an' quiet in de neighborhood, kos dere was likely ter be er sudden bustin' up in bizness an' goin' inter bank-rupsy all roun'."

"This bladder with the turpentine in it is a regular trick with these incendiaries, then, is it?"

"'Bout as kommon 'mong Sheenies as wearin' wiskers, boss."

"Are you satisfied, sergeant?" put in the captain at this juncture.

"I am more than satisfied, so far as the boy is concerned. And, what is more, I want to tell you that you've got a pretty bright chap there."

"Nobody knows that any better than I do," said the captain, proudly.

"Yep; dere's one, cap'n," interposed Sam.

"What is that, Sam?"

"Dat's me mudder's boy."

As they left the court-room, Mugsy came up alongside of his friend and said:

"Say, Sam, dey don't trun youse down er little bit, does dey?"

"Naw," was the polite response.

At that moment Gallagher, the policeman who had arrested Sam, came slouching out, and as he passed the boys he bestowed a dark scowl on them, and passed on.

When he had got a short distance away Mugsy called after him:

"I say, Gallagher did yer ever git left?"

The Irishman stopped and glared back at the boy.

"Oh, go'n soak yer night-stick, cop-sy!" laughed Mugsy.

"O'll kim back there an' roon yez in, af yez gimme anny more av yer gab, young feller!"

"Yer will not."

"Phwoy not?"

"Kos youse ain't got it in yer laigs, see?"

The policeman made a dash for the boy, but the boy dodged him, doubled on the policeman, dodged to the opposite side of the street, and then when he found that he was far enough away to take the chances, made a trumpet of his hands and yelled across:

"I say, Gallagher! w'en yer goin' ter 'rest any more kids wid bladders?"

By the time that Sam and the captain of No. 6 got back to the old house the police had paid it another visit and arrested Skrewbensky.

As soon as Sam heard of it he said:

"I'll go er banana dat de Sheeny didn't do de bizness, now."

"What makes you think so, Sam?" questioned the captain.

"Kos, if he'd 'a' been de cove, de cops wouldn't 'a' got onter 'im, see?"

"Whom do you suspect, then, Sam?"

"I don't 'spect nobody yit, but I'll run onter er clue 'fore long, if yer gimme er chance."

"You shall have all the chance you want."

As soon as the captain had left him, Sam thought he would go back up-stairs and reconnoiter for a clue.

But he soon found that other detectives from the regular force had already been there, and had either locked or nailed up all the doors.

So he went to the back of the house, which he did by going out the back way

of a saloon next door and climbing the intervening fence.

After looking about for some moments he discovered an area grate loose.

Sam lifted the grate and crawled through.

He found himself in a dark cellar but he could tell by feeling about that the cellar was filled with second-hand goods like the room upstairs.

He made his way with a good deal of labor over bales of rags and piles of broken furniture, and finally came to a door.

Opening this, the boy found himself in a narrow corridor corresponding with the one on the floor above.

As he was about to ascend the stairs, he was sure that he heard some one walking.

Sam tiptoed up the stairs as lightly as he could, and reached the landing in time to catch a glimpse of a figure as it dodged toward the foot of the stairs leading up-stairs.

"Now," muttered Sam, "he'll hafter be purty nimble on his pins ef I don't knab him."

It never occurred to Sam in his enthusiasm that the person might be as big as two of him, and therefore catching him would be rather a misfortune than otherwise.

CHAPTER III.

ONE CATCH.

By the time Sam had reached the third floor the visitor had entered the very door over which Sam had climbed earlier in the afternoon.

Without considering the danger of such an action, the boy tried the door, and, finding it unlocked, opened it and went in.

The light from the street coming in through the front windows illuminated the room sufficiently to enable him to discern objects tolerably well, and he saw what appeared to be a man of small stature standing in the middle of the floor.

He could not make out what the person was like, as he had his back to the window.

But the intruder recognized Sam quick enough, and the next minute called out:

"Hullo, Sam; w'ere wos yer?"

"Hullo, Mugsy!" cried Sam, "how'd youse git in heer?"

"Comed in de frunt way, o' course, like er gent."

"T'rough de frunt way?"

"Dat's wot I wos a-singin'."

"How'd yer git in de frunt way?"

"W'y, yer see, w'en I missed youse, I went nosin' 'bout ter find yer, kos I kind er wondered wot fer youse went off 'like dat widout sayin' nuttin'. So I mosied roun' fer er long time, an' purty soon dere wos er jay an' anudder chap comed an' unlocked de door to de store and went in."

"It wan't de Sheeny?"

"No, it wos some kind of er 'spector, I reckon, kos him an' de dood-lookin' cove wot wos wid 'im wos a-chinnin' 'bout de walloo o' de goods."

"But how'd youse git in?"

"Oh, I kinder follered 'em in."

"Didn't dey say nuttin' to yer?"

"Yep; one on 'em said: 'Here, kid, youse git out! 'jes' like dat.'"

"An' wot'd youse do?"

"I mosied."

"Wot den?"

"I watched me chance, an' purty soon I seen de two coves in de back o' de ranch an' I know'd it wos me chance, so I glided in like er shadder. I seen dat dey'd onlocked de door leadin' to de stairs, so's quick's a wink I darted t'rough de door

widout dem smokin' me, an' den I mosied up de steps."

"Wot did yer want ter come up heer fer?"

"Jes' fer fun; an' den I t'ought youse wos up heer. But, say!"

"Wot?" asked Sam, impatiently.

Mugsy glanced about, and then said:

"I seen er mug comin' up de stairs afore me!"

"Is dat right?" muttered Sam, opening his eyes very wide.

"Dat's straight; see!"

"Wot wos he like?"

"I couldn't see, clearly; but I t'ink he looked sumpin' like er Sheeny."

"Wich way did he go?"

"I t'ought he comed in dis door."

"Den he mus' be in heer summers now," said Sam, looking about.

But as the room was not very large and he could see every part of it, Sam soon gave up that idea.

"He ain't in dis room, dat's certain, an' wot's worser still, dere ain't no door leadin' out, 'cept inter de hall."

"Dat's so," admitted Mugsy, after glancing at the wall separating this room from the next. "I guess de cove must 'a' went out t'rough de roof er de floor."

"I 'spect he did."

Just then Sam noticed a lot of charred rags and broken furniture, which was also badly scorched, and all of it soaked with water, tossed up in a heap in one corner of the room.

This might have been done by the firemen, but Sam was inclined to think differently.

Walking over to the mass of stuff, Sam grasped a bed-rail which was sticking up and pulled it over, upsetting the whole mass.

This revealed a closet door.

It did not seem possible that anybody could be in the closet under the circumstances, but the boy's curiosity prompted him to open the door, and he did.

Standing in the closet was a little bent-over Jew with long whiskers.

Sam had seen the fellow about Skrewbenschky's store, and knew that his name was Isadore, but beyond that he knew nothing about the fellow.

"Hullo, Sheeny!" said Sam. "Wot're yer doin' heer?"

"Nosing," mumbled the Jew.

"Nursin'?" laughed Sam. "W'ere's yer kid?"

"I means dat I vas not doing nosing," explained the Jew.

"Wal, dat's er purty place ter be in, a-doin' nuttin'. Seems ter me if I wos a-takin' er vacayshun, I'd go ter Coney Islar' er sommers like dat 'stead o' in er closet ter do me vaycatin'. But I reckon youse'd better come outen dat cubby-hole till I has a look at yer."

The Jew shrugged his shoulders, but did not budge.

"Come, git er jog on yer!" roared the boy.

"See!" interposed Mugsy; "he's a-hidin' sumpin'."

As Sam looked, he could see that the Jew had something behind him which he seemed anxious to conceal.

"Jes' git up offen dat nest-aig, Sheeny," commanded the boy. "We don't want no settin' hens heer."

With that he reached in, and catching the fellow, jerked him out of the closet.

"Nex' time I tell yer, I reckon yer'll move, won't yer?"

"Vat you wants?" muttered the Jew.

"I don't want nuttin', meanin' dat I want youse. Wot's dat yer lef' in de cubby-hole?"

"Nosing," growled the Jew.

"Wal, we'll jis' see w'edder it's nuttin' er sumpin'."

With that Sam stepped over the pile of rubbish and stooped over some object which lay in the closet.

The next moment he raised something in his hand and held it before the Jew's face.

"Wot der yer call dat, Sheeny?"

The Jew looked at the object and grew very pale, but said nothing.

"Wot is it, Sheeny?" Sam demanded, fiercely.

"I don't vas knowed."

"Don't yer t'ink it looks sumpin' like er bladder?"

Isadore groaned.

"An' it's got turps in it," pursued Sam, examining the bladder. "Now I wonder wot youse wos a-goin' ter do wid er bladder wid turps in it. Wot d'yer t'ink, Mugsy?"

"I 'spect dat he wos a-goin' ter have er bon-fire."

"Is dat right, Sheeny? Wos yer a-goin' ter have er bon-fire?"

The Jew made no reply, but stood sullenly looking down at the floor.

"I shud 'a' t'ought yer'd 'a' got enuff o' bon-fires wid de udder one wot wouldn't go off. But dere ain't no 'countin' fer some folkses' cheek. Wal, Sheeny, I hates ter do it, but I gotter take yer to der cooler. So come on."

So saying, he grabbed the fellow by the collar and started to drag him toward the door.

The Jew offered no resistance, but for fear he might conclude to, Mugsy took the other arm, and he was hustled along pretty lively.

When the door was reached, and Sam put out his hand to open it, he imagined he heard footsteps on the stairs.

As he listened Sam glanced at the Jew, and although it had grown pretty dark in the room by this time, he could see that the prisoner's face wore a broad grin.

This caused the boy a start, for he knew it meant trouble.

But he nerved himself, and pretended not to notice the Jew's conduct, only remarking in a careless tone:

"I reckon youse expects comp'ny, don't yer, Isy?"

The Jew only smiled all the more, but said nothing.

"Wal, if yer has comp'ny, we might's well see 'em at onct, an' not keep 'em waitin'. 'Tain't good manners."

With that Sam threw open the door.

Half a dozen black-whiskered Jews confronted him, and twice as many more, it seemed, were packed on the staircase trying to crowd to the top.

The situation looked a trifle gloomy.

There appeared to be no means of escape without releasing the prisoner, and Sam would about as soon have allowed himself to be captured as to have made that sacrifice.

The prisoner seemed keenly alive to the situation, for the moment he saw Sam's dilemma, as he imagined, the fellow made a sudden movement and freed himself from his captors.

It gave Sam and Mugsy an excuse for vigorous action.

With one accord, each let drive with his fist from his side, and the fellow's head, receiving the shock from both sides at once, was so badly stunned that he dropped like a beef.

All that had occurred since the door had been opened had not occupied the space of a minute, and the mob outside had not had time to realize what was in the wind until they saw their whiskered pal fall to the floor.

Then they made a sudden rush.

It all appeared to be up with the boys now, but on the impulse of the instant, Mugsy had picked up a bed-slat and de-

livered a telling blow on the head of the foremost of the oncoming mob, which caused him to stagger backward.

But this only had the effect of enraging the remainder of the unwashed gang, and with a series of unintelligible howls in their own outlandish jargon, they came rushing upon the two boys.

CHAPTER IV.

TIMELY FORETHOUGHT.

It was a rare thing that anybody had ever caught Scaler Sam napping, and it was not for a gang of fire-bug Sheenies to do it.

No sooner had the second man in the procession as they filed through the corridor hurled his wounded comrade (the fellow whom Mugsy had treated to the bed-slat) out of the way and sprung forward, when Sam let him have it in the jaw with his fist.

This only had the effect of temporarily stunning the ruffian and at the same time maddening him, as well as the rest of the mob, to desperation.

That they meant murder the moment they could succeed in getting at the two boys, there was not the shadow of a doubt.

So the boys' only alternative was to prevent them from doing anything of the kind.

And Sam was not slow in finding a solution of the problem.

He remembered the bladder of turpentine which he had taken from the closet.

This he had dropped on the floor at the moment he and his chum had laid hold upon Isadore to hustle him to the door.

Taking a hasty glance at that gentleman, who still reclined in a not over-comfortable position on the floor, and noticing that the fellow began to move uneasily, he gave him an additional kick to keep him quiet till such time as he should be wanted.

Sam then returned to where he had dropped the bladder and picked it up.

Making a hasty slit in the bladder with his knife, but holding it in such a position as not to spill its contents, he ran to the door.

Here he found Mugsy busily employed in fanning back the mob and keeping them at bay with a heavy fire-poker.

Sam rushed to the door at the very moment when a well-directed swipe with Mugsy's poker had made such a thing possible by felling the last attempted intruder, and glanced out at the surging and now infuriated crowd on the stairs.

Some one of them had lighted a match at the very instant, and was holding it aloft to view the situation.

This not only enabled Sam to also view the situation, but to carry out his scheme to better advantage than he had anticipated.

After a momentary glance, the boy dashed the contents of the bladder down over the heads, whiskers, and clothing of the swarming Sheenies.

Instantly the lighted match ignited the turpentine.

There had not a large enough quantity fallen in any one place to produce an explosion, but quite enough had scattered and sprinkled over the clothing, hair and unkempt beards of the mob to cause a lively and panicky conflagration.

Such a scrambling to get down-stairs.

In less than a minute there was not a Sheeny on the premises, except the one Sam and his comrade had captured.

"Dat's wot I calls dosing folkses wid deir own med'cin," observed Sam, dryly, as he and Mugsy watched the stampede.

"I'll bet dere'll be some o' dem billy-goats wot won't need ter trubble de bar-

ber fer some time," volunteered Mugsy, with a snicker.

"Dat's right. Dey won't need none o' dis new-fangled singin' wot de gurls has on deir frizzes, nohow."

"It's lucky dat de burnin' turps didn't ketch de shanty afire."

"Oh, dem Sheenies didn't give it er chance ter ketch. Dem coves'd run t'rough er powder-fact'ry widout settin' off er grain. But let's mosey down an' ree-conawter."

When the boys reached the street, they witnessed a wild scene of excitement and panic.

The dozen and odd Jews, more or less ablaze, were utilizing every possible expedient to extinguish the flames.

Some had broken into the second-hand store, and, procuring as many of the filthy rags therein contained as they could carry, had rolled themselves in the unsavory mass.

Others had found small pools of water left by the spurting hose recently employed on the burning building, and were wallowing in these with the vain hope of putting out the fire; while still others had actually divested themselves of nearly every stitch of their clothing, and were tearing about, howling madly.

But the most ridiculous part of the whole scene was the arrival of a squad of policemen on the ground.

Puzzled and confused by what they saw, the policemen soon became as badly rattled as the blazing fire-bugs themselves.

For the most part the policemen were afraid to approach the incinerating wretches close enough to render any assistance, and stood at a safe distance or danced around them in a frantic manner, yelling and bawling like madmen.

Sam and Mugsy stood close to the side of the building, concealed in the shadow, meanwhile, interested and, being boys, amused spectators of the horrible, but to them amusing, scene.

The episode was of short duration.

By hook or crook, the flames were at length extinguished, and one after another of the luckless fire-bugs were carted off either to the hospital or the police station.

And, although there was not the least shadow of evidence of their immediate guilt, they were treated with the same severity as if they had been caught red-handed.

To Sam's mind this was as it should be.

He knew these fellows to be capable of the crime of which they were suspected, and that was enough for his simple notions of justice.

He knew, furthermore, that if he had let them alone, nine chances in ten they would have fired the house which was still dripping with the water which had saved it from one conflagration, and this stamped them as doubly guilty in his mind.

"Wal, wot now?" muttered Mugsy, after they had seen the last blistered creature carted away, like so much rare beefsteak. "Wot's de lay now, pard?"

"Wal," pondered Sam, seriously, "as dem blokes seems ter have deir muzzle turned on dis ranch, I reckon we might as well lay low and grub bait right on de prem'sis."

"D'yer t'ink dey're liable ter come back?"

"Not dat mob—least, till dey gits some o' de hotness drawn outen deir siss-tems."

"Some o' 'em'll need a pile o' soft soap to git rid o' deir hurtin's."

"Yes, er scraped 'tater. Dat's de most drawinest conn-cockshun wot dere is.

It'll draw de fire right outen er furniss by on'y jes' smearin' on de smoke-stack. Dat's right."

"Is dat straight, Sam?" questioned Mugsy, innocently.

"Dat's straight goods, Mug," replied Sam, solemnly.

After loitering about the old house for some time, Sam concluded it would be wise to patrol the rest of the district assigned to his guardianship, and off the two chums started.

They made the circuit without meeting with any adventure or espying anything of a suspicious nature, and were on their return, when Sam's suspicions were suddenly aroused by the appearance of a crouching figure slouching along with something concealed under a long coat.

As the suspicious character kept to the shadow of one side of the street, it was difficult to discern for some time whether it was male or female, black or white.

A transitory ray of light at length falling on the figure and vaguely revealing the face disclosed the fact that it was not only masculine, but of a very dark complexion.

Still Sam was unsatisfied.

"I cain't sorter make out wedder it's er Sheeny, er guinea, or er coon. If it's er coon er a dago, dere ain't much use follerin', kos, w'ile coons an' guineas is consid'ble fer usin' rayzers an' swipin' loose t'ings, dey don't offen go in fer settin' deir beds afire fer de life 'surance o' de bugs an' fleas. Howsemever, it won't do no hurt ter shadder dis cove, as de dawg said w'en it follered de gent wot was carryin' er 'coy duck. Yer cain't allus tell how soon er hones' man'll shed off an' turn out er fust-class rogue, jes fer de fun o' it."

And they kept on, but had not gone far before something occurred which well-nigh confirmed Sam's hitherto vague suspicions.

As the mysterious person was turning a corner, the light from the street-lamp fell upon a section of the object carried by him, and displayed a globular bulge of a bluish-white tinge which smacked suspiciously of an inflated bladder.

Sam's eyes, no less than those of his chum, were instantly enlarged by several diameters, and their breaths grew short and labored.

Although the fugitive had evinced no concern in the matter of his being shadowed, even if the suspicion had ever entered his head, the boys instinctively assumed a cat-like mode of pedestrianism from that out.

Another half block brought them to a row of wretched story-and-a-half rookeries, unquestionably the habitations of the lowest class of negroes or their equally unfastidious brethren, Italians or Russian Jews.

Into the entrance of one of these the mysterious being was about to turn, when Sam stayed his progress by placing a hand upon the fellow's shoulder, and intimating.

"I say, Mr. Wotyer maycallim, I don't like ter be unperlite, but yer'll 'blige me awful by 'xzibitin' dat artickle wot youse has got stowed onder yer frills."

"Whut's dat, honey?" mumbled the old negro, as he now proved to be.

"I want ter take er peep at de trezzur wot ye've got shinin' onder yer ulster."

"Whut, dat?" cried the negro, promptly bringing to light the suspicious object.

"W'y, honey, dat's nuffin' but er jug o' keer'sene whut de ol' woman done sent me arter. Whut you'lls want know 'bout dat, chile?"

Sam had no further immediate business with the suspect, and moved on.

CHAPTER V.

"TRUN DOWN."

"Say!" ejaculated Sam, suddenly, a little while after he and his chum had left the old negro, "it jes' now strikes yoor'n trooly dat I ain't dropped onder any fillin' fer quite er spell, an' I feels 'bout as holler as er brick shanty after de fire-bugs has got t'rough wid it. Less look up er hoss-teltry."

"Dere's er joint over heer wot's not bad," said Mugsy.

"W'ere is de palayshal ree-sort?" questioned his friend.

"Right roun' in Sout' Fif' Ave'; see!"

"Wot is it—sumpin' on de style o' Del-money-co's?"

"Way 'head o' Del's! W'y, youse kin git soft-shell Bostons on de half an' ham wid de feaders on. An' talk 'bout coffee! W'y, it's de mos' innercent coffee yer ever see. A fly'll tumble inter it, git out an' shake hissself, an' say: 'Ah, dat wos de bes' fresh-water bat' wot I got fer a year.'"

"It mus' be er daisy joint," said Sam, thoughtfully. "I reckon we better take it in."

They walked on for a short distance, and then Sam stopped short, put his finger alongside his nose, emitted a long whistle, and ejaculated:

"Gee-whittiker Harlem flats! Dat's one on your'n trooly!"

"Wot's de row, Sam?" grunted Mugsy.

"De Sheeny wot we took pris'ner in de ol' house!"

"Dat's so! We clean fergot his w'iskers."

"Dat's right—in de 'citement."

"I wonder wot's 'come of 'im?"

"Dunno. 'Spect he's comed to an' mo-sied off. Guess we'd better trot roun' dat way an' ree-kernawter."

And so they did, but to no purpose.

When the two boys reached the room on the top floor where they had left the unconscious Jew in the excitement incident to the burning turpentine, the fellow was nowhere to be found.

As Sam had suggested, he had evidently recovered consciousness and crawled off.

Still, not satisfied, they searched the old rookery from attic to basement, but without finding the fugitive.

"Dat's erbout de cutest trick wot I ever know'd er cute 'tective ter perpytrate," observed Sam, bitterly, as they reached the street. "I t'ink I'll take de ward wot I'll git fer savin' de joint to hire some able-bodied feller ter kick me all over town."

"Dat wos onct w'en yer got trun down, eh, Sam?" giggled Mugsy.

"Yep; but 'tain't no laughin' matter. Less go git sumpin' ter eat ter settle our stummicks, fer dat experdishen jes' 'bout pulled de linin' outen me."

A few moments later they entered a cheap little cafe in South Fifth avenue, which for flies and pungent smells could have given a slaughter-house odds.

The establishment was run by an Italian, and when the gentleman in person brought a plate of "ham-and," accompanied by a cup of the "innercent" coffee of which Mugsy had spoken, Sam cast his eyes suspiciously at the host's hands, and as soon as he had withdrawn the boy observed, in his usual matter-of-fact tone:

"Tain't none o' my bizness, but if it'd been all de same ter dat dago ter 've handed us de provinder afore he shined dem shoes, your'n trooly'd 'a' bin jes as well satisfied."

"Dat's de trubble wid runnin' er res't-rant an' er shinin'-stand in 'junction," reflected Mugsy. "W'en dey're shinin' yer up, dey're liable ter make er mistake

an' use ere beefsteak fer er bresh, an' w'en dey go ter give ye yer grub, dey're liable ter put some o' dat yaller stuff wot dey use fer yaller shoes on yer tap-py-oker."

But the reflection was lost on Sam.

His eyes and mind were in a different direction, and when Mugsy looked across the table at him to ascertain why he had not responded to his last remark, he found Sam gazing at some object on the opposite side of the restaurant.

"Wot's de racket, pard?" questioned Mugsy, curiously.

"Oh, nuttin; on'y if dat dere w'iskers over dere ain't de same goose-eater wot we kapchered in de Skrewbensky 'stab-lishment, I'm er trolly gong!"

"D'yer, t'ink?"

"Course I does."

Mugsy turned and gazed in the direc-tion for some time, and then observed:

"It does look mighty like Isadore; an' yit dere's sumpin 'bout de complekshun o' dis chap's w'iskers w'ich don't quite seem ter corode wid der windlings o' t'other cove. Might be dat he's 'guised hisselt by pourin' tater-soup on his w'iskers ter change de color. I wisht we'd er noticed wedder Isadore had er strawberry-mark on his lef' arm er not."

"Oh, I'm dead shore dat it's our duck," protested Sam. "Look how quick he winks his eyes, as dough he wos 'feared dere would be er flash o' turps an' douse his glimmers."

"Wal, wot 're goin' ter do?"

"Lay low an' smille fer a minit. Den w'en his raglets 'temps ter change his venoo, we'll stay his progress by takin' 'em inter our lovin' embrace."

"Wal, yer'll not have long ter perpare yer lovin' embrace," interposed his friend, "fer I see he's 'bout t'rough wid dinin'. He's already wiped his knife on 'is w'iskers, w'ich corrysponds wid er gent usin' 'is napkin fer 'moving de day-bree f'om his chin after eatin' soup outen de tail-end o' a spoon."

And Mugsy's prophesy was not far out of the way.

He had scarcely more than finished speaking when the Jew arose from the table, wiped his mouth on his coat-sleeve and proceeded toward the front of the restaurant.

Sam had only commenced eating; nevertheless, he arose quietly from the table and walked unconcernedly up to where the suspect was by this time standing—in front of the desk, paying his bill.

Hastily paying his own score, with that of Mugsy, who had reluctantly left his half-finished meal to follow his leader, Sam waited until his man was again on the move toward the door, when he quietly laid a hand on his somewhat greasy lapel.

"It pains me awful, me trootent fren, ter hafter deesturb yer peaceful 'fleck-shuns, but it 'pears ter me dat we've met afore, as de green-goods cove said ter de jay."

The Hebrew stared at Sam, shook his head, wagged his long beard and replied:

"You vas meestaken, mein frent. I don't vas ever recognished dat vace by mein life, alreaty."

"Yer only t'ink yer didn't!" sneered Sam. "Wal, meebby, if youse will wipe yer specs wid yer red bandanner han-kercher an' put 'em on, youse'll be able ter dee-skrimmynate me deestinguished fizzy-og-no-money."

The house-burner stared at the boy with the same blank absence of expres-sion, but offered no further discourse just then, so Sam continued:

"Perhaps youse kin 'call er instants wot 'curred dis aft, w'en yer wos hidin' in er closet on de top floor o' ol' Skrew-bensky's palashal furnycher ranch, an' was settin' on er turps bladder liker er widder hen on er door-knob. D'ye 'call dat little eppysode, sheeny?"

"Naw, naw, naw!" protested the Jew, struggling to free himself from Sam's grasp, "I know nuttings of vat you say! I don't vas effer peen by dat blace vat you speak of. Ledt me go! I musht re-durn do mein peesness!"

"Wot's yer bizness, sheeny?" sneered Sam. "Scorchin' cribs? Kos if it is, I wants ter tell yer right now dat de biz-ness is overdid, an' youse'd better give it a rest till fine-ances in de 'shurens line picks up a bit. In de mean time, we'll jes take youse ter a nice quiet summer boardin'-house, w'ere dey'll treat yer to all de luck-sherrys o' de seeson, sich as stale pone an' bootleg. By de way, sheen, did youse ever guzzle any bootleg?"

"Footlec? Vash ish das?" muttered the Hebrew, mystified.

"W'y, its er decockshun wot yer might t'ink wos coffee, if yer wos ersleep, er had a jag on, but it ain't; its wormy bread-crusts, ground up like coffee an' parched, den de water—dey use real water, sheen—den de water's pored over de grannylashun, an' dere ye air. It ain't much fer strenknin', but its bootiful fer de com-plekshun, an' it'll make yer w'iskers curl lovely. But come 'long. Dey might git weery waitin' fer yer."

"I know dey're powerful ankshus," supplemented Mugsy.

"Powerful! De Sargin was onable ter steal er wink o' sleep kos youse wasn't snorin' in 'hind dem lattices. Trot er-long, Brudder Abryham!"

And, with the assistance of his chum, Sam hustled the Hebrew, in spite of his feeble protestations, out of the restau-rant.

"When they got him to the first cor-ner, there was luckily a policeman stand-ing there."

"Here's er crum fer yer, Mr. Cop," ob-served the matter-of-fact boy detective. "I reckon yer have er few more spair bedchambers wid spring mat-tresses in, ain't yer?"

"Phwat's this?" growled the officer, eyeing the boy dubiously.

"Wal, I ain't much up on anymal syens, boss; but he kinder looks like wot dey calls down in Baxter street er 'barker'. But up in dis 'risterkratic sub-burbs, dey calls 'em 'fire-bugs'; but I reckon de speeshy's 'bout de same de wurl' over."

"D'yez soy he's a folre-boog?"

"Dat's erbout his waist-mashur."

"Phere did yez d'hop anto him?"

"Wal, at present writin's, we hitched onto his frizzes over heer in er eatin'-found'ry; but subseckently afore, it wos my joyous priv'lege, me an' me chum's, ter ketch de varmint in er closet, keepin' er turps bladder warm."

"A phwat?"

"A turps-bladder. Don't youse know wot er turps-bladder is?"

"Oi do not, sor."

"Wal, youse is er dizzy peeler! W'y, dey ain't er kid 'bout de corners wot don't know what er turps-bladder is."

"Well, phwat is it?"

"W'y, its nuttin' more'n less dan er bladder wid turpentine inter it, an' its 'ployed by dese bugs ter singe cribs. Ketch on?"

"Oh, this is wan o' thim Sheeny folre-bugs they talk so much about, is it?"

"Dat's right."

"An' who aire yez thot be's playin' spotther widout lave er loisense?"

"Widout leave er lisens?" sneered Sam, indignantly; "wal, I likes dat! I reckon if youse'll call at t'ree hundred Mulberry, an' ax 'em dere who Scaler Sam, de Fire-Bug Ketcher, is you'll fin' out quick 'nuff."

The policeman had no more to say, and took his prisoner along.

CHAPTER VI. A NEST OF BUGS.

"Hully Gee!"

"Wot?"

"Dat."

"I don't see nuttin'."

"Den youse'd better spit on yer han's," observed Sam disdainfully. "Don't yer smoke der w'iskers snoopin' inter de basemen' over dere op'site de ash-bar'l?"

"Oh, dere in de alley?" said Mugsy.

"I didn't say on de roof, did I?"

"I wonder wot dey're up ter?"

"Dat's one o' dem t'ings wot dey calls con-none-dums, kos de more yer cons 'em de dummer yer gits, an' w'en yer gits t'rough yer don't have none lef'. Jes' de same, I'm er goin' ter keep me peepers on dat crowd o' w'iskerses."

It was just after Sam and Mugsy had turned the fire-bug over to the police-man and then accompanied him to the station to prefer charges against the prisoner.

The two boys strolled back to the neighborhood of the late episodes, and when within a block of the old house where the fire had been, Sam's keen eyes had caught sight of a suspicious knot of individuals filing down into an area-way.

The building over the basement into which the men were crowding was, Sam was aware, occupied by the same class of Russian Jews.

Unlike the former building, the ground floor of this one was filled with second-hand clothing.

The two additional floors above were supposed to be occupied by Jewish fam-ilies.

The hour was still early, being but little past ten, and yet there was not a light to be seen in any part of the build-ing.

Sam and his chum waited till the last man was inside, and then passing across to the same side of the street, glided a short distance up the alley and waited.

For a long time nothing could be seen or heard.

The boys listened attentively and watched for the appearance of a light.

At length Mugsy, who was getting tired of this sort of dallying, growled:

"Say, Sam, dem fellers is gone in dere ter roost. Dat's right."

"Dat may be so, but I t'ink I'll smell 'em fer er little longer, an' if dey don't show some symptoms o' gittin' gay by dat time, we'll leave 'em wid de fleas an' udder varmint."

Sam had hardly spoken, when a light appeared on the top floor.

It was a feeble light, similar to that of a tallow dip, and it was moving from one point to another.

"Dere's sumpin goin' on up dere," whispered the young detective. "I shouldn't be s'prised if de ol' bladder-game was ter be worked some more."

So saying, Sam started toward the rear of the house.

"Wot now?" asked Mugsy.

"I'm er goin' ter git up dere, if dere's any sich t'ing as er back door er a fire-'scape."

But on reaching the rear of the build-ing, which he accomplished by climbing a high board wall from the alley, Sam found that, although there was a back

door, it was either nailed or locked up so tightly as to defy any ordinary attempt at opening it; and there was not the sign of a fire-escape.

Sam saw there was nothing to be accomplished in that direction, so he climbed back into the alley again.

"Wot luck?" questioned Mugsy.

"Nuttin'. Dere's no use foolin' roun' dat seckshun o' de globe. I'm er goin' ter see wot dere is in de basement-way wot de Sheenies took, fer luck."

To his surprise, the men had left the door unlocked.

"Dat looks crooked on de face o' it," he mutterred. "No gent goes ter bed an' leaves de door open. Now say, Mug, youse jes' stay down heer an' keep yer peepers on wotever goes on, at de same time I'll go up de flume an' see how de wiskers is gettin' on. Dey may be playin' er dark game o' poker, an' I kin help 'em out on er blin'."

"Its kinder dangerous goin' in dere by yer lonely."

"Dat's nuttin' w'en yer git yoost ter't."

Sam groped along for some time through a mass of ill-smelling goods, and at length came to a rude staircase.

Before ascending this he stopped and listened.

It seemed that he could hear voices on the floor above, but they appeared to be muffled, so as to make them seem a long way off.

Sam stole up the rude steps as noiselessly as possible, and at the top he listened again.

The voices now seemed to be on the floor above.

So the young detective climbed to the next floor.

But only to find out beyond doubt that the knot of men were on the top floor.

The peculiar intonation of the Hebrew voice had deceived him.

He was not long in reaching the top floor, and it was quite evident the men were not expecting any intrusion, for they had not taken the precaution to fasten the door.

Sam pushed the door slightly ajar and peeped in.

A glance was sufficient to convince him that a fire was about to be set.

It now turned out that there were but five of them, and they were all working about a heap of rags of some sort, some of them being engaged in saturating the mass with kerosene, some working them up after they were saturated, and one of the group stood on a chair arranging the indispensable turpentine-bladder.

Sam looked about him, and saw that the door at which he stood was the only one leading from the narrow hall into the apartments.

Something must be done, and that in a hurry.

In another minute, probably, the fire-bugs would set off the mass of rags, and instantly thereafter attempt to flee from the building.

The point was to prevent this.

If the door had only opened outward, the problem would have been easily solved.

Then, as he poked about in the darkness, he ran against something which seemed to be a huge ice-box, and so large as to almost fill the corridor.

If he could only move it in front of the door, his scheme would be complete.

He tried it, and found that he could move it by tipping it end over end.

Sam then turned the key in the door, and afterward rolled the ice-box in front of the door.

The huge concern almost filled the

space between the door and the opposite wall, but for fear the men inside might gain some advantage by the few inches leeway, the boy gathered up some boards he found about the hall and crammed them in between the ice-box and the opposite wall, thus completely wedging it in its place.

And the work was not completed an instant too soon.

The next moment there was a series of tugs at the door from the inside, accompanied by what appeared to be fearful imprecations in the Jewish jargon.

But it was no use. There was no such thing as either getting the door open or breaking it down.

At the same time Sam realized that the fire had probably been set off before this time, and he became as anxious to escape from the building as the Jews themselves.

So the boy lost no time in hurrying down the steps, leaving the fire-bugs to the fate they had prepared for the old building.

But when he came down stairs and came to realize what he had done, Sam's heart failed him somewhat, and he felt rather sorry for his action.

It was too late now, however, and he stood looking up at the building with rapidly beating heart, expecting every second to see the flames burst forth and devour it, and the five human beings with it.

Thus he stood when Mugsy came up, and, seeing Sam with such a doleful countenance, asked:

"W'y, Sam, wot's eatin' yer vitals? Youse look as if yer was on de aige o' bein' 'lectercooted."

"Nuttin', Mugsy," replied his friend, sadly, "on'y dere's five Sheenies up dere wot'll go up in de 'sploshun in erbout er minit."

"Wot d'yer mean?"

Sam related how he had fastened the fire-bugs in the room after they had already set the fire to destroy the building.

Mugsy laughed uproariously.

"W'y, I don't see nuttin' 'bout dat ter feel glum over," he said. "Its er purty good joke on 'em, accordin' ter my way a t'inkin'. Its er killin' rats wid deir own pizen."

"But it will be er awful deat'," sighed Sam.

"Oh, dey won't suffer long. Dey'll soon be outen deir miz'ry arter dat turps-bladder goes off."

The boys waited for ten or fifteen minutes, and then Sam began to suspect why the explosion did not take place or the building burst out in flame.

"Say?" he muttered at last, "we's is er couple o' chumps!"

"How's dat?"

"D'yer s'pose dem Sheenies is idyets 'nuff ter stan' by wid deir han's folded an' let 'emselves git blowed up?"

"Dat's so!" gasped Mugsy, the truth flashing on him.

"Course not. Dey've doused de glimmer afore dis."

"But its cur'us w'y dey doesn't try ter git out."

"I 'spect dey air a-tryin' ter git out, but dat's all de good its a-doin' 'em."

At this point a thought occurred to Sam, and he walked round to the rear of the building and looked up.

There a sight met his gaze which astonished him.

The fire-bugs had procured a rope and a large clothes-basket from somewhere, and as Sam looked four of the men were at the upper window paying out the rope which was attached to the handle of the basket, in which the fifth one of the Jews was seated.

Calling his companion to him, Sam said:

"How's dat fer injin-nooity?"

"Dat's er fire-'scape wot dey orter git er patent onter."

A happy thought flashed into the young detective's head.

"I'll fix deir flute in erbout er minit," he remarked. "Come wid me."

And off he dashed.

Mugsy followed, and soon the boys were inside of the basement and clambering up the first flight of stairs.

In two minutes they were on the second floor.

Sam rushed to the back window and threw it up.

The basket containing the man had just passed the window in its slow and gradual downward progress.

Reaching out and grasping the rope, Sam whispered to his chum:

"Grab holt!"

Mugsy understood the scheme, and grasping the rope, the two set to hauling in with all their might.

It was too dark for the men above to comprehend at once what was going on, they imagining that the pulling was due to the weight of the basket, although they must have thought their comrade had suddenly decreased in weight by several pounds.

Meanwhile, the boys had so manipulated matters that, while they were pulling in the slack from above, they were at the same time holding the basket in a stationary position.

This went on for some time, when the man in the basket, evidently became puzzled why he did not move downward any longer, and finally called up:

"Zay, vat's der meatter mit you vel-lers oop dere? I don't vas go me any longer downvays, by un long sight! Vas?"

"Gaghen t' hellofabout!" was what the boys imagined they heard from above. "Vat's der maetter mit der cround vot you don't vas reached it already? You vas vant to go by Shina, ain't it?"

Meanwhile the boys had made the rope fast to the leg of a heavy bureau, and then left the building.

When they reached the ground the fire-bug was still dangling there in the basket, and Sam sent Mugsy for a policeman.

CHAPTER VII. IN A TIGHT FIX.

The man in the basket, unable to understand why he did not continue to descend, kept up a constant yelling in a jargon of mixed Polish, Hebrew and very broken English; while the men at the window above, who were quite as much puzzled as he was to understand the trouble, played him an even game in the matter of yelling.

This was the status of affairs when Mugsy returned, accompanied by two policemen.

Only an outline of the men could be seen, and when the cops had climbed over the fence and looked up they were unable to make out what the men were about.

"Phwat air yez throyin' to do up dhere?" called one of the officers.

Instantly all became quiet and the four heads disappeared from the window.

The man in the basket looked down, but said nothing, and then one of the policemen called to him:

"Phwat air yez doin' in thot bashket, ye blagald?"

"I vas dryin' to git town," whined the poor Jew.

"Wal, phwoy don't yez kim down?"

"Becos I gouldn't, mein friendt."

"Phwoy can't yez kim down?"

"Idt vas der robe, meinheer."

"Th' robe minehear? Phwat in the name av the howly saint is thot?"

"Der robe by der basket," screeched the desperate Jew.

"De Sheeny don't mean der robe wot yer puts on yer," explained the young detective. "Wot he's tryin' ter spit outen his Rooshen chops is sumpin' to de 'fect dat he's held up dere by er rope wot's 'tached to er basket; see?"

"How did he git int' th' bashket?" growled the policeman.

"Oh, dat was one o' his Sheeny pranks, I reckon. Better ax 'im yerself, copsy."

"Don't yez know nothing about it, b'y?"

"No more'n er blind kitten knows de color o' its mudder. Ax de Sheeny."

And the policeman did ask the Hebrew, but that was all the good it did him.

Between his foreign jargon, which was wholly unintelligible to the officer, and the fellow's nearly as unintelligible broken English, the policeman became more mixed up every minute, until at last he grew so exasperated and hoarse with yelling that he concluded to give it up and try to find some way to get the fellow down.

The two boys enjoyed the discomfiture of the two policemen, and watched their bewildered movements with silent delight.

After hunting around for a long time, one of them asked:

"I say, boy, how did that fellow get up there? I see that all the doors are locked."

Sam, who always had a certain respect for a man who spoke to him in good English, answered politely:

"I reckon if youse'll go right down in dat airy-way dere, youse'll fin' yer way ter de top o' de house, pervidin' ye're good at scramblin' over ples o' duds an' 'tings wot don't smell like cologne-water. On'y w'en yer git ter de top, youse'll hafter move some furnicher ter git de blokes outen de rume."

"Have you been up there, boy?"

"Course I has. It wos t'rough me in-junooity dat dem coves is 'fined in de sky-parlor."

"There are more of them, if I understand you?"

"Yep; dere's erbout four more roostin' up dere, 'joyin' de meller smell o' de rags wot dey setted on fire."

"You don't mean to tell me that these are some of those incendiaries?"

"Nope; I didn't say nuttin' o' de kin'!" responded Sam, indignantly. "I said dey wos Sheenies."

"I know; but they are incendiaries?"

"I reckon not. Dey're Rooshens, an' fire-bugs."

"That is exactly what I was coming at, my boy."

"Wal, w'y didn't yer say so? Talkin' 'bout sindyarys! Yer might as well 'a' said dey wos Zooloos."

"Well, whatever they are, I should like to have you accompany me to the top of the house, for, if I am not mistaken, this is Scaler Sam, the great fireman detective."

"Wal, I reckon yer ain't no more mistaken dan de lady wos wot took one o' her twinses fer de udder twin's brudder."

After which explicit illustration, Sam led the way into the dark basement, followed by the two policemen and Mugsy.

After a good deal of stumbling and losing their course, the quartet finally found their way to the first steps, and thence on to the top floor.

One of the policemen had carried his

bull's-eye lantern all the way up, and he now flashed it about the narrow corridor.

Seeing how Sam had secured the door, the policeman laughed and remarked:

"Sam's work, for all the world! Who but him would have thought of such a thing?"

"W'y, yer see," apostrophised Sam, "dere wan't no chance o' gittin' dem blokes inter de cooler at de time, so I t'ought de nex' bes' t'ing was ter close 'em in wid er ice-box."

"And a very clever piece of work it was."

"But de nex' t'ing's ter git 'em outen dere."

Both policemen looked at Sam apprehensively.

"Do you imagine," asked one, "that they will be likely to show fight?"

"Dat 'pends. Er Sheeny'll fight w'en he has ter, jes' de same as er worm'll bite w'en yer steps onter 'im."

"Some precaution will be necessary, then, in opening the door."

"Och, phwat air yez afeered av?" growled the Irish policeman, impatiently.

"Yez nlvver yit saw a Shany phwat wud foight. Open th' dure an' let us hov it out wid thim!"

Somewhat shamed by this reprimand, the other officer lost no more time, but, ordering everybody to take hold, seized the ice-chest himself, and soon it was thrown away from the door.

The officers were on guard, and drew their revolvers ready for instantaneous use.

But, to their surprise, there was no sound of any one attempting to escape.

They waited for a few minutes, and then Sam turned the key in the lock.

"Dat'll give 'em er better chance fer 'scape," he observed.

This was a surprise for the officers, who were not aware that the door was locked on the outside.

They were more fully on their guard now than ever, but without reason, for there was still no sound.

Sam at length turned the knob and threw open the door.

It was exceedingly dark within, but there was no sound of any movement.

It then occurred to Sam that the men were at the back of the building, whereas this door was nearer to the front than the rear.

He, therefore, concluded that they might be huddled back there and keeping as quiet as possible to avoid discovery.

But had that been their scheme they would have been badly left, for after another moment's hesitation, the young man stepped inside, in spite of the policemen's whispered admonition for him not to go.

But seeing that he was not to be deterred from his motive, both officers and Mugsy followed Sam into the dark room.

It was some moments before the policeman with the lantern could be induced to flash the light, and not till they had groped about in the darkness until it seemed that they had searched every nook and cranny of the place, did he consent to do it.

And when he did finally flood the room with the light it was only to find that no sign of a man was to be seen.

The floor consisted of two large rooms, opening into each other, and the police lost no time in visiting the front apartment.

But with no better success.

The officers stared at each other and then at Sam in bewilderment.

Suddenly it seemed to dawn upon them that Sam had played them a trick.

"Luck yez, young mon!" muttered the Irish policeman, "hov yez not been playin' us a bit av a thrick, bad cess to yez?"

"Nope," returned the boy dryly.

"Thin phwere has thim four divvils phwat yez was talkin' about gone to?"

"It does look a trifle strange, my boy," supplemented the other officer. "I can hardly think you would play us a trick; but how do you account for the complete disappearance of these men, whom you say you had fastened in so securely, and whom you really had securely fastened in if they were in here at all?"

"Wal dey wcs in heer, an' yer kin say wot yer likes," growled Sam, not over pleased at the insinuations. "But w're dey has gone, dat's one o' dem t'ings wot dey calls merry-cals."

Sam reflected for some moments, and then looking up at the ceiling suddenly exclaimed:

"On de roof, gents! Dat's de way dey made deir 'scape!"

"That is probably so," cried one of the officers. "I wonder we didn't think of that before. But if they have made their way to the roof, and there is any way of escape from there, they are in all probability beyond our reach."

It did not require much searching to find the identical trap by which the fugitives must have gone, as the trap was still up.

By way of additional proof that the men had gone by this route, a number of boxes were piled up under the trap, the ceiling being very low.

"We're onter deir scent, anyway!" ejaculated Sam, enthusiastically.

"Yes, but I fear its a cold scent, Sam," answered the policeman.

"Anyway, dere's nuttin' like tryin', as de tramp said w'en he tried ter eat de wooden ham."

So saying, the boy mounted the pile of boxes, and was soon on the roof.

The moon was shining up there, and a single glance not only showed him that the men had made their escape, but how they had done so.

An adjoining building, several feet lower, but a safe jump, afforded an excellent egress from the taller building.

Once on the lower one, there were plenty of opportunities for escape from that.

"Well, what prospect?" inquired the officer when Sam returned to the room below. "Any sight of the runaways?"

"Not er shadder! Jes as I 'spected w'en I went up dere, dem coves jumped fer it, an' skun."

"So I suppose we are at the end of our rope for the present."

"Dat's right. An' dat 'minds me dat dere's sommon else at de end o' his rope."

"The chap in the basket?"

"Dat's him."

"Yes, we had better relieve him at once."

"An' have de satisfakshun o' scoopin' one Sheeny fer our trubble, eh?"

"That's it, Sam."

But it was not until the party reached the second floor and the officers saw how the rope was made fast that they had any conception of what Sam's plan had been.

"That was certainly a clever scheme, Sam," said the officer with a look of admiration at the boy. "You should have a promotion for that job."

"How air y'r a-goin' ter promote er man wot's already on top?"

"That's so, Sam, I hadn't thought of that. But let us get this poor fellow up."

With that all four men took hold of the rope and began to draw in.

It did not take long to discover that they had him safe at all events.

"Well, my good fellow," said the officer, "I suppose you got rather tired of sitting in that basket all this time?"

"Yah, I vash tired, und dem tam fools wouldn't ledt me no more down. Vat?"

CHAPTER VIII.

LAZY LAZARUS.

Before taking his prisoner away, the two policemen returned to the upper floor to examine the preparations which were being made by the "fire-bugs."

They were just as Sam had described them, except in addition, the evidences of a struggle to put out the fire when they had discovered themselves fastened in and at the mercy of their own machinations.

The bladder of turpentine had also been removed, and, as it was not likely that the burners would take that away in their hasty flight, Sam concluded that it must still be about the place.

This led to a long and tedious search of the premises, in the course of which an unsuspected closet was found.

The closet had the appearance of an ordinary china cupboard, only the shelves, which were very narrow, merely nailed on the door, and swung away with it, leaving the deeper recess behind.

It was by the merest accident that Sam discovered this contrivance.

After looking through the fake cupboard, and finding nothing but a few cheap dishes, evidently put there for a blind, Sam concluded to climb up and ascertain what there might be on top.

So, placing his foot on one of the shelves and using it for a step, he was about to pull himself up, when the door, which had been left unfastened, came open.

Quicker than a flash a man sprang out of the dark recess and darted for the door.

The Irish policeman was the first to recover his self-possession sufficiently to act, and made after the retreating individual as he was nearly reaching the door.

When the fellow saw that he was being pursued, he made a desperate effort to reach the door before his pursuers should reach him.

But the Irish policeman was quick on his feet, and grabbed the fellow just as he reached the door.

The next instant he let go his hold, however, put his hands to his eyes and began to dance about, howling like a fiend.

The fire-bug had dashed a handful of cayenne pepper into the policeman's eyes.

This rendered the officer helpless, and the fugitive had no trouble in making his escape.

It did not take Sam the ghost of a second to grasp the situation, and he was after the fugitive in a twinkling.

It was noticed, however, that as he ran the boy took a pair of queer-looking goggles from his pocket and placed them over his eyes.

The fire-bug had gained the corridor by the time Sam reached him, and, then, taking advantage of the darkness, instead of dashing down the stairs, as would have been expected of him, resorted to a very common trick among these gentry.

Squatting himself down in a knot on one of the steps near the top, he awaited his pursuer's approach, expecting the

latter to fall over him and go plunging headlong to the bottom of the stairs.

But this fellow defeated his own ends in his attempt to overdo the thing.

Still retaining some of the cayenne pepper in his hand, he evidently thought to put an end to Sam's progress at once and for all by dealing him the same dose as he had the policeman.

But he had not calculated upon Sam's precaution, and when he suddenly sprang from his crouching position and dashed the pepper into the boy's face, it hadn't the slightest effect, thanks to the goggles.

"Dat was onct w'en yer miscarried, Laz," laughed the boy.

But there was no time for merriment just then, for the Jew had no more than thrown the pepper, than he turned and attempted to dash down the steps.

Sam was on to his back in an instant, like a catamunt.

Then ensued a desperate struggle for a few seconds.

The Jew was the more powerful of the two, but Sam had the offsetting advantage of being on the upper side of the stairs.

The whole transaction had culminated so rapidly that the men in the room above were unaware of just what was in progress.

Moreover, between having the prisoner and a blind comrade to look after, the policeman, even with Mugsy's aid, was too much handicapped to divide his attention with Sam.

Mugsy had rendered one invaluable bit of assistance, however. He knew that grease or oil of any kind was a powerful anodyne for pepper, so he looked about the place, and at length came upon an old grease lamp.

"Here's de stuff wot'll tech de painin', copsy. Jes squat down heer till I loobrycate yer peepers."

Without a word he sank upon a broken chair which the boy pushed against his legs, and Mugsy set to work filling his burning eyes with the dirty grease.

"Dere!" exclaimed Mugsy, when he had rendered the policeman a most ludicrous sight by pouring something less than half a pint of grease in and about his eyes, "dat'll fix yer peepers."

The homely remedy was attended with almost instant relief, and the suffering man was unstinted in his praise of Mugsy's forethought.

Meanwhile Sam had not fared as well with his misadventure as he could have hoped for.

After giving the Jew a pretty lively tussle and inflicting a number of painful and more or less lasting injuries upon his antagonist, the latter suddenly found his opportunity of putting another trick of these chaps into practical use, and he was prompt to take advantage of it.

Thrown off his guard by his eagerness to render the fire-bug as nearly useless an ornament to society as possible, the Jew caught him in just the happy position for the carrying out of his project.

In other words, the boy was humped over the fire-bug's head, his knees resting on the latter's shoulders and his head pointing considerably downward.

With a sudden and unexpected lurch, the Jew hurled the boy heels over head, breaking his grasp, and dashing him, whirling over and over like a boomerang, down the stairs.

Fortunately, and largely due to the boy's athletic activity and natural toughness of fibre, he was not in the least injured, and was upon his feet in an instant.

But not so soon but that the fire-bug, realizing the importance of quick action, followed up his first manoeuvre with a terrific mad-bull-like rush down the stairs

and came upon Sam just as he was regaining his feet with such impetuous vehemence as to completely upset him again. And then, before Sam could recover his lost ground, the incendiary contrived to slide the bolt of the door, open it and make his escape.

Meanwhile, the uninjured policeman, backed by Mugsy, and in charge of his sightless comrade and the prisoner, had made a start toward quitting the premises.

There was little trouble with regard to the prisoner, as a more docile animal than this poor, cowed Sheeny it had never been the officer's fortune to meet.

And as for the blinded Irishman, Mugsy had undertaken to guide his footsteps as far as it would be necessary to call the assistance of an ambulance with its surgeon.

And thus the party reunited at the foot of the stairs.

"Well, what luck, my boy?" questioned the sound policeman.

"Not much," muttered Sam.

"Has the bird flown?"

"Dat's right. But I reckon he's wantin' sumpin' in de matter o' feaders."

"You gave him something to carry away with him, eh?"

"Yep, er few gouges," sighed the boy; "but if he hadn't bin in sich er hurry, I'd a kep' er sooverneer o' him dat 'ud a' kep' us bot' in lovin' 'membrance o' each udder fer de res' o' our lives."

"I hope you have inflicted some mark upon the wretch by which he can be identified."

"Oh, dere's no need o' inflickshuns in dat sheeny's case, boss. I gived him inflickshuns enuff; but he didn't need 'em. I cud spot dat rooster wid his yeers cut off. See?"

"Know 'm? 'Swell ax me if I knows w'ich han' ter use w'en de udder's tied. W'y dat's Lazy Lazarus. See?"

"Lazy Lazarus?"

"Dat's right."

"But who is he?"

"W'y he's de king-pin o' de fire-bugs, sir. All de udder w'iskers is infants side o' dat chap. He's de slickest trump wot dere is in de biz. He kin giv de cops de go-by w'en all de udders is hooked, an' he ain't got no more soul dan er wooden Injun. He'd as leaf roast er Chrischen fam'ly ter a dun brown as he wud er goose."

"Oh, the fiend!" ejaculated the policeman in horror.

"Youse may say feend, boss. W'y, I rudder t'ink dat cove is fond o' Chrischen kids turned over."

It should have been mentioned that the policeman's first movement on coming down stairs was to go to a patrol box which was on the same corner with the building, and send in a double call—one for a police patrol, and the other to the hospital for an ambulance.

It was during the interval of waiting the two conveyances that the foregoing colloquy ensued.

"How long have you known this Lazy Lazarus, as you call him?" resumed the policeman.

"Ever since I comed on dis case."

"How did you happen to make his acquaintance?"

"W'y it wos t'rough de firs' blaze wot I got onder an' put er chock onder. Dis varmint wos de setter, an' I 'countered him as he wos comin' outen de lower hall, an' we had er set-to. Wal, he trun me down on dat deal, an' lef' me a firs'-class subjick fer de hospittle; but I didn't go er little bit. I jis gaddered up me busted puckerin'-strings an' went in fer ketchin' an killin', like er ol' woman arter croton bugs."

"But how did you discover who the fellow was with whom you had had the tussle?"

"Oh, I fergot ter spill dat part o' de story. De fac' is, dat arter he'd knocked me inter er wreck, sumpin' like w'en er trolley car runs inter er fruit stan', an' I wos chucked inter er corner like er cast-off pair o' breeches, but still havin' me bearin's, de bloke piled on eensult ter inj'ry, by givin' me er las' kick, wid de cheerin' obzervashun: 'Take dat, yer Chrischen slooth-dog, an' let it learn yer ter keep yer feelers offen Lazy Laz'rus in foocher! Dat's wot he chinned, boss. But w'y he calls himself Lazy Laz'rus, w'en he's de livel'est sheeny I ever run onter, is more'n your'n trooly kin calkilate. Dat's right, boss."

At that moment the two wagons arrived, simultaneously.

CHAPTER IX.

ALMOST DEFEAT.

So lively had Sam, seconded by his trusty chum Mugsy, made it for the sheeny firebugs, and so unremitting had been his surveillance that incendiary fires had grown considerably less frequent, and the young detective began to feel uncomfortable because there was not more work to do.

He still had the consolation of knowing that Lazy Lazarus was still abroad, only waiting the opportunity to get caught and begin his inevitable life-term.

But for a long time the youthful detective could get no clue to the cunning fire-bug.

He not only watched for him in connection with the few incipient conflagrations which were started at odd times, and as surely extinguished by the indefatigable fireman-detective, but persistently haunted every conceivable resort where the gentleman would be likely to hang out.

But all in vain.

For a long time Sam imagined that the fire-bug had taken warning from his last narrow escape and left that part of the town, or, perhaps, the town itself.

One misfortune was that Sam had never seen the fellow in daylight, and it might be that he would not recognize him if they should meet.

At length one day he was passing through one of the noisome purlieus of Thompson street, when he noticed three fairly well-dressed Jews in company.

They appeared to be in high glee over something, and were chattering and laughing in their mixed jargon, when it occurred to Sam that the one in the centre had a familiar look about him.

Whatever the resemblance was, Sam could not recall it for the moment, as the chap was rather loudly dressed and wore a high silk hat among other adornments.

So deeply was the boy impressed with the real or fancied recognition of some one who might be wanted for something that he decided to shadow the three "sheeny dudes," as he denominated them.

They entered a saloon, before going very far, and Sam lagged in after them.

The three young men walked to the back of the room and seated themselves at a table, and Sam stopped at the bar and purchased a small glass of beer.

The detective would have given anything to have had his chum with him at that moment, but he had left Mugsy to watch a rather suspicious ol' clo' man who was unloading rags from a push-cart and stowing them in an old rookery.

So, as his chum was not there, there

was no help for it, and Sam would be obliged to go it alone.

Sam was an inimitable mimic, and could assume any appearance or condition on the shortest notice.

On this occasion he chose to assume the role of a drunken man, and after drinking his beer, slouched with unsteady step toward the rear of the saloon.

As he slouched along he noticed that the three young men were too deeply engrossed in their own affairs to bestow any attention on him.

So, finding himself unobserved, Sam took a seat at a nearby table, sunk his head on the edge of the table and affected to be asleep.

He was near enough to hear all that passed between the young men.

But, to Sam's discomfiture, after a few desultory passages in English, they fell into the "sheeny jargon."

Still, the little he caught while they were speaking English had aroused his suspicions that the three young men were not right, and he determined to keep his eye on them.

At length, however, they appeared to grow careless, almost hilarious in the declaration of something they had in view, and finally one of them dropped just the vaguest sort of remark, but which was treasured by Sam as a sweet morsel.

It was in a sort of bastard German, and what Sam caught of it seemed to be something like:

"Das vulst der Insurance machsen—"

Which was followed with a string of untranslatable gibberish which might just as well have been Chinese so far as Sam was concerned.

But the word "insurance" was sufficient.

That seemed to be the key-note to the clue for which he had been vainly seeking.

And then right on the heels of this, a few moments later, the party rose from the table, still laughing and jabbering, and one of them slapped the man whom Sam imagined he had recognized on the shoulder, and accompanied the action with the observation:

"It's a long dime vat Lacy Lasserous gits left, nicht?"

This was enough for Sam.

As the three young men left the saloon, the boy detective was close upon their heels.

Sam had taken particular note of the young man addressed as Lazy Lazarus, so that there could be no trouble about identification on a second meeting.

He was, as Sam set him down in his mental note-book, a rather handsome man, of not more than twenty-five, rather prominent about the nose, but of good complexion, exceedingly dark, and expressive eyes, and, like most young Hebrews, clean shaven.

But there was one point which particularly attracted the young detective, and that was the peculiarly powerful muscular development of the alleged fire-bug.

He wore a close-fitting dress-coat, and the muscles of his frame exhibited themselves in his arms, on his shoulders and along his sides, back and chest with every move, like cords of steel.

Sam did not wonder that he had found a job on his hands on the two occasions on which he had attempted to handle the fellow.

The trio sauntered along leisurely, puffing away at cigarettes, until they came in the vicinity of Washington Square.

Here, in some of the most neglected

portions of this once aristocratic neighborhood, a few of the better quality of the Russian refugees have quartered themselves in a style approaching respectability.

Into one of these places, an apartment house, the three young Hebrews turned.

This put a temporary end to Sam's investigation so far as related to the young men themselves, but he was determined not to let the matter rest there.

It was still early in the afternoon, and Sam surmised that the Hebrews had gone into the house for their lunch; that perhaps one of them—Lazarus, for instance—lived there, and the other two were his guests.

To satisfy himself on this point, he examined the names on the several bell-pushes in the hope of finding something approximating to Lazarus.

But on this point he was doomed to disappointment.

And then Sam came to the conclusion that probably Lazarus was his first (not Christian) name; so he went over the list again in the hope of finding a name with an "L" preceding it.

And he did—half a dozen of them—but he was as much in the dark as ever.

So there was but one expedient left him, and that was to shadow the house and see whether when this man came out, he would go about some nefarious business connected with incendiarism.

It would not do, as Sam was well aware, to risk going away and returning later, for these fire-bugs operated in daytime as well as at night.

The house faced the park; so Sam selected a convenient seat on the edge of the square from which he could watch the entrance of the apartment house without fear of discovery.

He had not been in his position long, before Mugsy, through some miraculous chance, found him.

"Hullo, Sammy, me chuck!" vociferated the chum, grinning from ear to ear; "wot in de name o' w'iskered sheenies air youse a-doin' in dis risterkrattick nayberhood? Yer don' 'spect ter fin' fire-bugs ermong dese swells, d'yer?"

"Dat's jes wot I'm layin' fer, Mug, ol' hoss. But wot sow'-sow' win' blowed youse inter dese waters, say?"

"W'y, it wos de merest axydent, ol' man. W'en youse lef' me spyin' de w'iskers wid de push-cart, I soon foun' dat he wos as innercent as er young cop afore he learns de ropes, an' so I knowed dere wasn't no yoose er pipin' him no longer, an' den I strolled off ter smell youse out."

"Purty soon I seen yer sniffin' long in der wake o' t'ree doods, an' I knowed dere wos sumpin' in der wind. I knowed it wouldn't do ter close in onter yer too clost, ner open, fer fear o' wingin' de game, if dat wos wot dey wos; so I kinder hung back, but kep' on follerin' ye. Here I am. An' now wot's de lay?"

Sam was silent for a moment; then he began by imposing the strict injunction:

"See heer, Mug, dis is er 'portant case, an' if I gives it ter yer, it's ter be on de dead sly, see?"

"Mum's de spiel," vowed his chum, solemnly.

"Will yer swear dat yer'll never pip, onder no 'siderashun, even if ye's hevin' yer toe-nails pulled out wid pinchers?"

"Not if I wos a hevin' me jaw-teet' 'strackted wid er crow-bar!" vowed his partner.

"Dat'll do, Mug. I'll trust yer, t'rough t'ick an' t'in, f'om life unter deth."

After a moment's solemn silence, Sam resumed:

"D'yer squint dat ranch over dere, Mug?"

"Wot—de one wid de green shetters an' der stone dawg on de portyco wid its nose knocked off?"

"Dat's de joint."

"Huh?" grunted Mugsy, wiping his nose on his sleeve.

"Wal, if dis chicken ain't mighty comfusticated, dat shanty's de palashul 'bode o' de noto'rus Lazy Laz'rus."

"Hully Gee! How d'yer know?"

"I jes winked 'im goin' in."

"Wos dat his job-lots wid de udder two doods wot youse wos pursocoin'?"

"Dat's de groc'ry sign."

"So youse is a'goin' ter lay fer 'is jaglets?"

"Dat's de pizen."

CHAPTER X.

A SLICK CUSTOMER.

The two boys bided their time and watched the house hour after hour, until near nightfall.

At length Mugsy began to evince indications of restlessness, which attracting Sam's attention, the latter advised:

"Yer seems ter be sorter oneasy, Mug, like er pug wid fleas; s'pose yer run away an' snatch er bite o' grub, an' den come back an' 'lieve yoor'n trooly fer er similar averkashun?"

"I t'ink dat would kinder ease de gnawin' o' me conshuns. Dere's er soothin'ness 'bout vittles at times wot no filossofy ner de consolin' 'fleckshuns o' de Scripturs won't take de place on."

"Dat's right, Mug. Now trot erlong, an' hurry back an' give yoor'n trooly er shake."

"Back afore er sparrer cop kin tip his dicer ter er hired-gurl." And off he ran.

Mugsy was back in the course of half an hour, and then Sam, who had nothing thus far to report, had his innings at the dinner-table.

Sam was somewhat more prompt, even, than Mugsy, but on his return he perceived at a glance that there was something in the wind.

Mugsy had risen from his seat and was pacing back and forth with the energy and anxiety of a caged leopard.

"Wot's de gripe now, Mug?" demanded his friend, imbibing the excitement at once.

"Dere!" muttered Mugsy, with great agitation, pointing toward the corner nearest the house, which he had been watching. "Dey went roun' dat way! See?"

"Who?" gasped Sam.

"Lazy an' his gang."

"W'y didn't yer shadder 'em?"

"I didn't know yer wanted me ter. I t'ought yer wanted me ter stay on der groun'."

Sam looked at his friend with an expression of withering scorn.

"Say!" Sam muttered at last, "I likes er chump. I dotes on 'em; but youse soots me too muchly, see?"

Mugsy was hurt.

He gazed at his late devoted friend, and his lip trembled.

At length he muttered tremulously:

"Say, Sammy, I reckon I've made er mistake?"

"I reckon yer has, Mug. An dat's jes de 'scuse o' de big-gun 'tectives w'en dey lets er slick bit o' game slip t'rough deir fingers. Dey made er mistake. Sur, dere ain't no sich wurd as mistake in de palaver o' de true 'ective!"

Mugsy was crestfallen.

After a painful silence of several seconds, during which the invincible Sam continued to stand with one hand thrust

in his bosom, scowling a scowl that would have made the little Corsican blush with envy, Mugsy put out his hand and muttered hoarsely:

"I've bin trun down, Sammy. Dead. Kin yer fergive an' fergit?"

Sam hesitated.

His heart was in the right place, but he could not forget the weighty responsibility that rested on his young shoulders.

But after another season of reflection, his stern nature yielded, and, accepting the proffered hand, responded with kindly firmness:

"I fergives dis time, Mug; but more on 'count o' ol' 'quaintance an' by-gone ree-kollexyuns, dan kos yer 'serves it. But 'member, an' dont let it 'cur agin!"

"Never!" avowed Mugsy, "never, s'long's dere's breat' in dis perspirin' brow!"

"Nuff said. Now, let's ter work, as de boss uster say. W'ich way did yer say dese blckes mosied?"

"Right roun' de corner dere," exclaimed Mugsy, transported at his new lease of favor in the eyes of the young hero. "Dey wosn't shinnin' terribil verlossypeed, an' I t'ink we might overtake 'em wid lively sprintin'!"

"Lively sprintin'!" replied Sam, "Wal, I reckon! Wot d'yer t'ink? D'yer s'pose dem coves is snails?"

Mugsy winced, but said nothing.

After another protracted glare of disparagement the young detective growled:

"Come on! If dere's merteer'al in youse, I'll cendeever ter make er 'tective out o' yer."

And the two chums left the park and made their way in the direction the three fugitives had gone.

But they might as well have gone in the opposite direction, so far as any still existing chance of overtaking the firebugs was concerned.

After walking on for some distance Sam stopped and observed in a despondent tone:

"Wal, I reckon dere's no more use o' trampin' de turrerfares wid der forlorn hope o' ketchin' sight o' dem roosters t'night; it's now near midnight, so I s'pose me an' youse might as well seek our dreemy hutch."

"Dat's de way it 'peers ter me, Sammy."

And they were about to part, when Sam's quick perception was attracted by the sudden appearance of a close carriage turning the corner and driving along Thompson street at an easy jog.

The detective watched the progress of the vehicle from his shadowy standpoint with marked interest for some moments, and at last muttered almost inaudibly:

"Tain't no common sight ter see er swell layout like dat in dese parts at dis o'clockness, dat's shure."

"Dat's straight," echoed his chum.

"Wot che say we watches 'em?"

"Jes' w'at I'm goin' ter do," and the two boys proceeded to watch the slowly-moving vehicle in silence.

Presently the carriage stopped in front of a tall but badly dilapidated tenement-house.

"Dere's deir meat, an' dere's deir fowl," soliloquized Sam. "Turps an' keroseen an' ol' clo! Dem's de pass-words in dat holy 'lians."

With that they moved quickly and quietly to the opposite side of the street. Keeping within the shadow, the two boys stole noiselessly along until they came up behind the vehicle.

There were evidently four people present, and part of them, Sam was unable to tell just how many, had already alighted,

and there was a lively discussion in progress, partly, as usual, in very bad English.

There was one man, however, although he seldom spoke, and then in subdued, guarded tones, who used perfect English, and to him Sam turned his undivided attention.

After listening for some time, the boy concluded that he was talking (the little that he did speak) through the medium of an interpreter, and in the course of a good deal which was unintelligible, regardless of the fact of its being in his own tongue, Sam was able to grasp this complete sentence:

"This is outrageous. The underwriters will smell a mouse. I have already rated the old rat-trap at four times its actual value, and if anything should come up, fraud would appear on the face of the transaction."

Then followed a long, unintelligible wrangle between the supposed interpreter and some one else, which, in turn, was doled to the English-speaking person in very bad English. Whereupon he responded in emphatic terms:

"No, I shall do nothing of the kind. Be satisfied with a reasonable thing, and let her go. I do not propose to jeopardize my neck, to say nothing of my position, for the sake of a few dollars more or less. Where is Lazarus?"

"Hier I vas!" cried a voice from the depths of the gloom near the house. "Vas ist, Meinheer Conroy?"

"Come here!" commanded the other, who, it appeared, retained his seat in the carriage.

There was a shuffling of feet, and then the fire-setters spoke in close proximity to the carriage:

"Vas ist, Meinheer?"

"What is to be done about this, Lazarus?" demanded the English-speaking individual sternly.

"Pout vas, Meinheer?"

"About this business here to-night. These scabs of yours are growling about the rate being too low on the old rookery. I say that it is as high as we dare fix it. Anything higher would be suicidal."

"Yah, soo'site," muttered the Jew.

"That is what it would amount to," was the dry response, accompanied with a low chuckle. "Chin your gang in your own particular hog-Latin, and let us have the thing over with. I don't propose to sit out here all night for the gratification of a parcel of grasping sheenies! Let us have an end of it."

Whereupon the individual addressed as Lazarus turned his attention to his dissatisfied co-sectarians, and then followed a clatter of discordant words which out-Babeled Babel.

At length, however, the matter was satisfactorily settled.

"It vas allus reicht, Meinheer!" ejaculated Lazarus, exultantly. "It vas allus reicht!"

"Then proceed with your conflag," muttered the man in the carriage, and, putting whip to his horses, rolled away.

CHAPTER XI.

IN A TRAP.

Sam was in a state of great perplexity when the dispute, which a moment previously appeared in a good way to continue for the remainder of the night, came to the sudden and unexpected termination above recorded.

For an instant he puzzled his head, whether he should not run after the receding vehicle, which he could have easily overtaken, and learn, if possible, something of the man within, who, Sam

felt sure, was some important official in some Insurance Company.

On the other hand, here was this man Lazarus, who, Sam was satisfied, was the leader of this gang of fire-bugs, and whom the young detective was exceedingly anxious to capture.

And so long had he taken to make up his mind in the matter that the vehicle got too far away, so Sam had to choose the one alternative left—stay where he was and use his best efforts to corral the chief fire-bug.

Fortunately, although the retreating carriage had left himself and friend within a yard of the conspirators as they had stood by the vehicle, they were at present too much engrossed in the subject of the affair which was so soon to be consummated to pay any heed to the boys.

Sam's initial move was to whisper to Mugsy, and tell him to go for a couple of policemen, and to caution them to make no noise on approaching the place.

By the time Sam had made himself clear to his partner, the squad of fire-bugs—which seemed to have recruited somewhat, as there were now something like half a dozen of them—had melted away, one or two having entered the old house and the rest deployed themselves in various locations about it, as outposts or picket-guards.

This was a precaution which Sam had never noticed them taking before, and he concluded that the forethought was the fruit of the two previous fiascos in attempted conflagrations.

The young detective determined to effect an entrance to the rookery at all hazards.

The building was badly situated for his purpose.

It stood near the centre of the block, but was partly exposed on both sides.

On the one side there was a narrow passage, not more than a yard wide, between it and the next building, and on the other another old rookery had been recently demolished, leaving nothing but a heap of debris.

On either side and at the front the outposts of the enemy were stationed.

Sam's only alternative, therefore, was to reach the rear.

As matters stood, considering his scarcity of time, Sam concluded that his only resource was to slip by the guard on the side where the heap of debris was.

Pulling his hat down over his eyes, the boy assumed the slouching attitude of a tramp, and went stumbling along over the heaps of lath and mortar, as if in search of a place to sleep.

He kept to the opposite side of the lot from where the picket was stationed, but was somewhat exposed by the light of the glaring moon.

The picket, who stood close to the old house, in the imagined security of its shadow, watched the boy's movements with considerable interest, and when Sam finally reached the high board wall, over which he would be obliged to climb in order to reach the rear of the threatened building, the fellow started toward him.

Sam did not hesitate for an instant, although he had seen every movement of the picket, but proceeded to quietly scale the fence.

The guard uttered no word, but when he came to realize Sam's intention, he made a spring for the boy.

Sam was too agile for him, however, and not only succeeded in eluding the fellow's grasp, but in catching the top of the boards and drawing himself about half-way up.

The picket now became more determined than ever, although up to this mo-

ment not a word had been uttered on either side, and making another spring, caught the boy by the leg.

But the succeeding second, it is probable, the fellow regretted his action, for his hands had scarcely closed upon Sam's calf, when the latter wrenched his iron-like limb from the fellow's grasp, and then quickly followed the action with such a terrific kick with his heavy nailed boot, landing the blow squarely in the picket's face, as to send him reeling to the ground with a groan of pain.

Before he could recover his dazed intellect, Sam had succeeded in shinning over the wall, and landed on the opposite side.

Tripping along the inside of the wall (it will be understood that he was now in the yard of the property facing on the next street) Sam soon came to the point of the fence at the rear of the endangered house, where it would be necessary for him to climb back.

This was all accomplished in a twinkling, and the boy found himself in the yard of the building against which the fire-bugs had their nefarious designs.

There was no trouble about entering the place, for, although the back door was locked, there was a window near the ground, the shutters of which were open, and the sash Sam discovered he could raise without any difficulty.

Without the least hesitation, the boy threw up the sash, climbed in and was soon groping his way through a dark, lumbered-up room in search of a stairway.

In this he was sadly handicapped from his total ignorance of the location of the staircase, and after bumping about for some minutes, he resorted to the only alternative left him, which was to strike a match and hold it aloft in order to locate his bearings.

At the very instant at which the match flamed up, Sam heard a stealthy footstep at his side, and before he had time for even thought, he felt himself pinioned by two pairs of strong hands, and the succeeding instant he was hurled to the floor.

Not a syllable had been uttered, and, the match having been extinguished, leaving the place in total darkness, he had no means of so much as guessing who his captors were.

He surmised, however, that one of them must have been the guard on whom he had inflicted the vigorous kick and one of his pals, who had forestalled the boy's manoeuvres by entering the building by a side or the front door.

Meanwhile the ruffians proceeded to bind and gag the boy in such a manner as to preclude any movement or the utterance of so much as a sound.

His captors then stole away as silently as they had come, leaving the young detective alone with his despair.

Not a sound could be heard as the boy lay there alone in this dark and wretched old rookery, harassed with the momentary expectation that the building would burst into flames and devour him in the merciless conflagration.

Sam listened—listened with his whole concentrated attention.

Presently he imagined that he could discern the faint crackle of burning straw or some other similar combustible.

A little later, the sickening fumes of burning rags and other noxious debris had forced itself down from above and offended his nostrils.

Sam shuddered at the anticipation of his fate.

One thing he could not understand. Why had not the police for whom he had dispatched his chum, arrived?

Had they pursued the usual stupid course characteristic of the average policeman under similar circumstances, of contenting themselves with merely arresting or putting to flight those whom they found on guard outside, without troubling themselves with any further investigation?

But Sam had other matters to think of.

The crackling overhead had evolved into a sullen roar, and the boy listened—listened breathlessly—his heart hardly daring to beat, for the disastrous explosion which must soon burst upon the stillness and spread desolation and ruin on all sides.

And then what would become of Sam?

At that moment the fire-bells rang out clear and sharp on the stillness of the second watch of the night, and in another moment the furious clang and clatter of the engines, mingled with the excited voices of firemen, broke upon the helpless boy's ears.

Then he heard the firemen at work.

Ladders were being erected against the building, hose placed and axes manipulated in the work of creating openings in the old shell to permit the introduction of a hose.

Oh God! would these brave, thoughtful fellows think of searching the lower floor for their young comrade—their protegee?

The prospect did not look hopeful, but the boy waited, hoped, wished, prayed—horrors!

There is the explosion!

A crash, a deafening sound of falling timbers and—the heartrending shrieks of a human being, doubtless crushed and mangled into an unrecognizable mass!

From his lonely viewpoint Sam could already see the ravenous flames bursting through and stealing along the rafters like golden serpents.

How long—merciful Heaven!—how long must it be before the crumbling shell would fall and bury the poor defenseless boy in its seething hell of embers?

Sam closed his eyes and heart, and waited.

CHAPTER XII.

LIKE THE GIDDY FLEA.

For the next few seconds—they seemed hours to poor Sam—the young detective underwent the tortures of the condemned.

The crazy old structure, riddled and honey-combed by the explosion, could not possibly stand many seconds longer.

At length the wreck did crash down, but by some providential interception, as it seemed, a beam fell in such a manner as to lodge at one end, and there rested, bearing the weight of the mass of debris which had crashed down with it.

This, as Sam understood too well, could be but a temporary respite from death at best, for as soon as the consuming flames should have an opportunity of gnawing through the beam, the whole mass would settle down upon and bury his defenseless form in the burning furnace.

So the boy uttered a silent prayer, and resigned himself to fate.

But just at that opportune instant Sam felt a tug at his clothing, and the next moment a face bent so close to his own that he could feel the hot, quickly-drawn breath, and heard the familiar voice of his faithful friend, Mugsy Mullen:

"Is dat youse, Sammy, ol' feller? Yer ain't dead, air yer, ol' chum? Dis is yer ol' fren Mugsy. Don't yer know me? But, come on, lemme he'p ye outen dis pestiferous hole."

With that, his patient ally assisted Sam to his feet.

But finding that he could not walk, owing to the thongs about his ankles, Mugsy first felt down, and, learning the status of affairs, took out his knife and quickly severed the bandages that bound him, and also the one over his mouth.

"Now, I reckon youse kin toddle, ol' fren," said the boy in a soothing voice.

Although his limbs had grown somewhat stiff from the long exposure to the gripping cords, Sam managed to hobble along, with Mugsy's assistance, at a pretty good pace, and the two friends were soon outside of the rapidly crumbling building.

And not a second too soon.

For they had scarcely reached the yard at the rear of the house, when there was a second crash, and Sam realized that it was the identical beam which had hung during those dreadful minutes between him and death.

"Jes in de nick o' time, ol' pal!" muttered Mugsy.

Sam made no response, but clasped Mugsy spasmodically in his arms and pressed him to his bosom.

At length he found his voice, however, and faltered forth in a voice thick with sobs:

"Mugsy, ye're me perserver—me save-ye! Ye're de bes' fren I ever had, an' de greates' hee-row wot ever 'xzisted! An' yit—an' yit," he stammered thickly, "I cain't fergit dat right on de toes o' dis 'xposchew-latin' event, I done yer dirt. Dat's right, ol' fel—pardener o' me side—I done yer dirt! An' I didn't d'serve dis!"

Mugsy was deeply moved, but he bore up manfully, and answered in as cheerful a tone as he could command:

"No yer didn't do me dirt, Sammy. Yer didn't never do it. An' if yer did, s'elp me, I've done fergot it."

"Ef yer means et, let by-gones be by-gones, an' say rite heer, in de presents o' deth an' d'struckshun, dat we'll be frens till kingdom come. D'yer swear?"

"I swears!" avowed Mugsy, solemnly.

This solemn compact was scarcely cemented, when the attention of the two boys was attracted by the appearance of a slouching figure which had come around the corner of the now almost demolished building.

As the firemen were still struggling with the hopeless old wreck, the boys at first thought the figure might belong to one of the latter, who might be on the prowl in search of any possible lurking fire-bugs.

Fortunately the boys stood in a spot of gloom, where the mysterious prowler could not espy them, while he, as he moved about, finally came out into the light of a flaming section of the burning building.

The person was clad in a suit of cast-off clothing, which gave him the appearance of a tramp.

But a single gleam of the light across his face, in spite of the wretched slouch hat and a false moustache, was sufficient to disclose to the keen perception of the young detective the fact that the man was none other than the notorious Lazy Lazarus!

"I wonder wot dat varmint is prowlin' roun' heer fer?" whispered Sam.

"Watchin' ter see wedder youse 'scaped wid yer immortal'ty, I reckon," philosophized Mugsy.

"I 'spects dat's jes wot he's arter. Wal, he won't do no more prowlin' on your'n trooly!"

As Sam uttered the prophecy, Lazarus had come up very near to where the boys

stood, and, without apparently discovering their presence, turned and started to retrace his steps. At the same time four other men appeared on the scene.

But he had scarcely done so, when Sam, with the activity and impulse of a wild animal, made a heroic spring and landed a vicious kick squarely in the fire-bug's face. Instantly the other mysterious men disappeared.

The action had been so sudden and unexpected as to not only take the Jew off his guard, but, unprepared as he was for the shock, he went headlong backward to the ground. Instantly Sam was on top of the sheeny, pummeling him in good fashion.

"Dat's de stuff!" yelled Mugsy, clapping his hands in glee. "Give 'em one fer his mudder!"

And then, by way of encouraging the under man, which happened to be Lazarus this time, Mugsy emphasized his remarks by administering a number of vigorous kicks to the most exposed portion of the fallen fire-bug's anatomy.

"Dere, take dat, yer pesky roaster!" muttered the boy. "Hadn't I better git er bran' outen de burnin' buildin', Sammy, an' singe his ringlets by way o' givin' him er tas' o' his own med'cine? Er shall we snake 'im bod'ly an' toss 'im inter de embers? I dunno how roas' sheeny 'ud go, but if we had Missis Lillygillhooly, o' Howairye, heer, she might 'joy er slice. See?"

Mugsy could have gone to the assistance of his friend at any time after the tussle commenced, and between them the matter would have been brought to a speedy conclusion; but there existed a sort of tacit code among the boys of their class by which it was understood that, in the absence of an invitation, each boy was to fight his own battle.

However, the detective was in no need of his assistance, for in less than no time the Jew cried "enough!" with all the energy that the vise-like grip on his wind-pipe would admit.

Sam immediately arose and permitted his antagonist to get upon his feet, but the latter was a sorry sight.

"How d'yer feel now, Mister Baby-burner?" sneered Mugsy. "D'yer feel as dough yer could 'joy roastin' er couple o' fam'lies as er sort o' er night-cap afore goin' ter yer slumb'rin' hutch? I tink—gee whizz! Wot 're been tryin' ter do wid de measley punk-lugger?"

The sudden exclamation had been called forth by suddenly catching a glimpse of Lazarus's face in the light before alluded to, and the sight of it produced a shock even in this rough-and-tumble chap, used all his life to witnessing brutal bare-fist slugging matches.

"Wot wos yer tryin' ter do, Sammy?" he repeated. "Work up er sort of er new-fangled sassage, wot ye'd call fire-bug wurst? If yer did, yer made de worst job on it I ever see in me born days."

The Jew was so enraged by all this that he could control his passion no longer, and drew off and struck Mugsy in the face.

Quicker than a flash the boy's arm shot out, carromed on the villain's already wounded face, and he dropped like a beef.

Lazarus regained his feet with a slow and painful motion, after which he lapsed into inactive and silent sullenness.

"Wal, we's done 'bout 'nuff foot-ballin' wid de vaggybone," mused Sam. "Le's take him to de city lodgin's."

It being only a short distance to the station, and the hour being very late by this time, Sam concluded not to disturb the patrol service but walk his man to the station instead.

Lazarus went along docile enough for some time, until the station was almost reached, in fact, when he suddenly made a break and dashed away like the wind before either of the boys could foresee his design.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE NEEDLE IN THE HAYSTACK.

Sam and his friend Mugsy stood for a full minute, too much overwhelmed with astonishment to either speak or make a move toward pursuing the fugitive.

Sam was the first to break the silence.

"Wal, by hoakey!" he at length ejaculated. "I've heered o' fleas, an' seen 'em, an' I know dat w'en yer finger's on 'em dey ain't dere. But dat bloke kin give de livelies' flea in er Harlem flat ten ter one an' beat 'im wid his eyes shet."

"An ter t'ink," muttered Mugsy, who appeared to take the disappointment to heart even more than his friend, "ter t'ink o' de ol' clo' sinjer er runnin' off wid dat mug. Oh! don't I wish I'd hit 'im anudder w'ile I wos 'bout it' jes fer luck?"

"Never mind, Mugsy," consoled his chum. "We'll smoke de cove afore he knows it. Dat mug o' his'n'll keep him in de bood-war fer de nex' fortnitt, as de dood 'tective uster say, an' dat'll give us er chance ter run in on his roost."

"Sides, if he does vencher on de street, dat gob o' his'n'll be er dead spotter fer de p'leece."

It being not far from daylight by this time, the boys separated, Sam returning to the hook-and-ladder house, where a bunk was always reserved for him, and Mugsy to some unknown garret. Only, Mugsy had somewhat the better of the game, as his chum never received a reward without making a liberal "divvy," as it was denominated among their set.

But, as the boy never was seen with a cent two hours after receiving his share of the reward, and as his clothes were so ragged that Sam frequently took pity on him and bestowed such superfluous articles of firemen's uniform on his friend as he did not, or pretended he did not, need, the young detective had long since settled it in his own mind that Mugsy was chipping in the bulk of his earnings for the support of certain unknown and mysterious helpless brothers and sisters, and, perhaps, a sick mother or a drunken beast of a father.

But such was Sam's native delicacy in matters of this kind that, as Mugsy had never alluded to the matter during all of their days and nights of chumship, he (Sam) scrupulously refrained from touching upon the unpleasant subject.

The boys had been chums ever since either of them could recollect, and when Sam had got into the fire department Mugsy had hung round the hook-and-ladder house, and was tolerated by the men, and even accorded a sort of rude welcome, by virtue of being Sam's friend.

The following morning after the escape with Lazy Lazarus, Sam was up and about his detective business—that is, the surveillancing of the rows of tumble-down old fire-traps which had become the legitimate prey of the fire-bugs.

It was not long before he ran across his chum, and the two started on their patrol together.

That day and the next passed, however, without any adventure worth mentioning.

Either the fire-bugs had received a bad scare, or the latest and most disastrous fire had admonished them to keep quiet for a few days until the excitement had blown over.

But, instead of Sam viewing this in the light of success, as might have been ex-

pected, he was rather despondent in consequence.

"T'ings is gettin' bumpshus dull roun' dese corners," he complained. "I feels like er doctor in er healthy nayberhood."

"De trubble is," consoled his friend, "dat youse has did yer work too well an' too fas'. De bricklayer wot duz two days' work in one cain't grummel if he's laid off on de secon' day. Anyway, dere's Lazy ter look arter yit, an' dat's some konsulasun."

"Dat's right," admitted his friend, brightening. "Dere is sumpin' ter 'jolge over in dat."

"I wonder w'ere de bloke's hangin' out?"

"I dunno—in de hospittel, mebbby."

"Dat's too bad."

"Wot?"

"It's too bad," repeated Mugsy, "ter hav er likely mug like Lazy layin' up in de dryer, w'en he orter be doin' time in de pen, er havin' er comferble set-down in de 'lectrick cheer."

"Yep, but sich is life. But on de udder han' dere's lots eddycated crooks wot's er ornymint ter deir perfeshun wastin' deir preshus time bottomin' cheers on de 'lan'."

The above colloquy took place on the third day after the fatal conflagration.

It was late in the afternoon, and Sam, having patrolled his district from an early hour, was somewhat weary and indifferent as to the result of things in general.

He and his chum strolled along slowly in the direction of Washington Square, Sam with his head down, paying very little attention to what was going on about him, and it is doubtful whether he would have noticed even a fire-bug had one suddenly popped up before him.

They had walked on in silence after the little talk above recorded for some distance, and were nearing the little park, when Mugsy broke the silence:

"By de way, Sammy, has yer kep' yer peepers on de ranch over dere lately? I notiss dat w'en I've bin wid yer youse never did, an' wot twisted my t'ing-t'ing mos' wos dat yer never chinned 'bout it."

"Nope. I hasn't took much notiss o' dis joint lately, dat's er fack. De fack is, I kinder t'ought it wosn't much yoose. But now dat youse speaks o' it, Mugsy, I dunno dat we kin do no better dan ter lay fer de game in dis locayshun."

"Seein's we hasn't nuttin' else ter do."

"Dat's right, Mugsy."

And so they seated themselves on the identical bench from which Mugsy watched the game walk away from him on the afternoon preceding the evening of the fire.

Here they sat until long after nightfall, and still no sign of the fire-bugs appeared.

"I kinder t'ink it's er cold scent," muttered Sam discouragingly. "Youse has notissed dat dese chaps gen'rally starts out afore dark, er a little arter, er else not till arter midnight."

"Dat's so. But wot d'yer t'ink—dat we'd best shadder 'em till midnight, er go 'way an' come back?"

"I t'ink we'll go, an' den come back," replied Sam, rising. "Er go, anyhow."

Sam walked leisurely away, and Mugsy arose and followed him.

In leaving the park it was in their way to pass the identical house in question.

As they came near the front stoop, what appeared to be the same closed carriage which they had seen on the evening of the great fire drove up and stopped.

As the vehicle stopped, Sam and his companion stepped quickly behind it in such a way as to conceal themselves from

the occupants in the event of the latter alighting.

It had grown barely dusk, and the lights in the street-lamps were just beginning to flicker.

There appeared to be but one occupant, and as soon as the vehicle came to a standstill this person put his head out and said something which the detective could not understand to the footman on the seat, whereupon the footman dismounted, and walked up the stoop of the house and rang the bell.

After a moment's delay, the door was opened and what was probably a servant appeared. To him the footman from the carriage delivered some message, and then returned to the carriage and remounted his seat.

Two or three minutes later a man came out wrapped in a long cloak and muffled to the eyes, notwithstanding the evening was excessively warm.

It was impossible for the boys to see the man's face, but from his walk and general movements Sam surmised at once that it was none other than Lazy Lazarus.

He stopped beside the carriage and conversed in a low tone—so low that the young detective could make out nothing that was said—and at length climbed in and the carriage rolled away.

But not without Sam on this occasion. He had nothing else to look after this time, and he decided at once to devote his spare moments to looking into the affairs of Mr. Lazarus and his companion, whoever he might be.

So, as the vehicle was about to start, at a signal from Sam, he and his chum hopped up and took seats on behind, the carriage being admirably fitted for this sort of clandestine riding, by virtue of having a seat or shelf made expressly, no doubt, for a footman to sit on.

The carriage bowled along for some time, and Sam soon discovered to his surprise that it was going down Broadway.

CHAPTER XIV.

A GREAT SURPRISE.

The farther down the great thoroughfare the carriage proceeded the greater grew Sam's astonishment.

It had grown so dark by this time that he and his friend attracted no particular attention from people whom they passed, and so the two lads rode on comfortably and unmolested.

When the vehicle reached City Hall Square, it turned across the triangle and continued down Nassau street.

In this direction the pace was kept up until the carriage had almost reached Wall street, when it stopped in front of a tall office building, and here the two occupants alighted.

Sam and his chum had taken time by the forelock, and when they perceived the vehicle turning toward the curb they hopped down from their seat and took refuge in the shadow of the wheels.

But they remained in this position but a short time.

Remarking that the two men had entered the office building, Sam quietly communicated to his partner his own plan of operation, after which the two boys glided softly into the broad and gorgeous entrance of the building.

They perceived at a glance that the elevator had stopped for the day, and knew therefore that the men must have walked up the stairs.

They must have done this, because the lower floor was occupied as a bank or brokerage establishment.

Sam listened, and, sure enough, he could hear not only footsteps wearily climbing the stairs, but the muffled sound of voices, with the strange reverberation peculiar to the voices of persons conversing in stairways in a large building.

As everything appeared quiet about the place, everybody having departed for the day apparently, Sam wisely concluded that the footsteps and voices belonged to the two men of whom he and his chum were in quest.

And so they started up the long and tiresome ascent, climbing one interminable flight of stairs after another, until they were both ready to drop in their tracks.

They had sighted the game passing from one staircase to another as the boys approached the head of the staircase which the men had just accomplished, and satisfied themselves that they were on the right track.

Thus they toiled up six or seven pairs of stairs—almost to the top of the tall building, in fact, and finally saw their men enter a door leading into an office, or a suite of offices, as it proved.

This seemed to put an end to Sam's inquiry for the time, but it was not the young fireman detective to succumb to trifles, and he proceeded to reconnoitre for some means of overhearing or seeing what was to pass in the office by some clandestine method, entering the office itself being out of the question.

The office, like all offices in these buildings, flanked a great hall and was the last but one from the end of the hall.

Near a large window which looked out upon an airshaft, and some eight feet from the floor, was one of those circular revolving ventilators.

Without considering very much as to the probability of accomplishing anything by the movement, Sam looked about for a means of getting up to the ventilator, and was fortunate enough to find, in a toilet not far off, a stepladder used by the janitor in climbing around the building.

This he carried and placed under the ventilator.

The fan was revolving slowly, but by placing his finger between the frail wings and the outer rim Sam was able to bring the apparatus to a standstill.

This enabled him, by standing on the top step of the ladder, to peep down into the interior of the office, and, by piece-meal, scrutinize about all there was in it.

He was also able to hear with perfect distinctness anything which might be spoken inside.

Providentially, as it would seem, the two men had come into this very apartment, which was probably the private office, and were at that moment seated at a long table in such a position that Sam could not only see all their actions, but hear whatever they might say.

After cautioning Mugsy, in a whisper, to keep a sharp outlook for any such prowlers as the janitor or some of the other tenants, Sam devoted himself heart and soul to the business of watching and listening to his supposed game.

It should have been mentioned that the two men had lighted a glaring electric light which hung over the table and illuminated everything in its vicinity with great brilliancy.

It shone fully upon the face of the man with the cape, who, by the way, had thrown the cloak aside on entering the office; and, despite divers patches and plasters attached to various parts of his physiognomy, Sam had no difficulty in recognizing in the face that of his sometime adversary, Lazy Lazarus.

The other man, who had the appear-

ance of a person engaged in clerical pursuits of some kind, had spread a map on the table, and a very slight scrutiny was sufficient to convince the young detective that it was a map of New York City.

The only difference which he could perceive between this and the ordinary city map was the presence of numerous squares and triangles done in glaring red ink.

"This is the idea," began the clerical gentleman, pointing with a pencil to the red spots alluded to. "This map has been prepared by the fire underwriters to defeat our ends. These red squares represent sections of the city occupied in whole or in part by your people."

"Vat's der scheme?" muttered Lazarus sullenly.

"The scheme is to avoid taking any risks on property occupied by Jews, don't you understand?"

"Yaw," drawled the fire-bug; "but vot are you coing to do 'pout idt?"

"Do? We have got to get up a counter-scheme and beat them at their own game."

"How you do dot, mein friendt?"

"It is not going to be an easy task, I admit," answered the other, a trifle dubiously. "But here is my plan."

"Vell?" growled the Jew.

"For the present we must transfer our operations to the buildings occupied by other nationalities, and in the meantime we must get the boys at work and have them canvass the families of your people and induce them to change their names temporarily to those of other nationalities."

"Iwish, fehinstenz?"

"No, I hardly think that Irish would do," laughed the insurance man, as Sam now assumed him to be. "It would hardly be possible for a man with your nose, for example, to reconcile your facial expression, not to mention your dialect, with the name of Shamus O'Tool. No, that won't do, Lazarus. We must choose something more harmonious with common sense."

"How vouldt Idalyun do?"

"Tip top; or Cuban or Portuguese, or—"

"Don't zay niccar, mein friendt," interposed the Jew. "I don't vas like niccars."

"I don't know so well about that," laughed the other. "I know a good many negroes who take it as a great insult to be mistaken for sheenys, Lazarus."

"Now, mein friendt, vy you zay sheeny? I don't like dat vord."

"To tell you the truth, I don't either, Lazarus, and I like the people who bear it a cursed sight less!"

Lazarus blanched and grew red by turns, and he appeared to have some difficulty about breathing for some seconds. Meanwhile, his black little eyes snapped like electrified buttons.

"You likes to do peezeness mit de Shews, shust der same, Meester Conroy? You likes der monish vat you gits oudt of de sheenys, as you galls dem."

"Oh, as to the money, I like that all right enough, but as to liking to do business with you or any other beast of a Sheeny, my only reason for doing so is because I am not so constituted as to be in the least particular as to how I come by my money, so long as I get it. But," he went on, suddenly cooling down, "let us settle this other matter. What do you think of the scheme?"

After some seconds the Jew spoke, but his remarks, as will be seen, bore no relevance to Conroy's question. The Jew's sensibilities had been too deeply touched for that—just yet. He said:

"You vas beeter, Meester Gonroy. Maype you vas vergot somet'ings. Maype eef I vas do dell you somet'ings, or maype eef I vas do dell somepoty else somet'ings—"

"Silence, you scoundrel!" yelled Conroy, jumping to his feet. Another syllable out of your head on that subject, and I'll brain you on the spot! I do not know why I should spare you anyway, now that I have you here where nobody would ever know what had become of you, if, indeed, anybody should trouble themselves to search for you."

The man became silent, and stood glaring down upon the cringing villain in a manner that would have made a stronger character than his quail and suspect that the man meant to carry out his implied threat.

It is altogether probable that the Jew did suspect that his accomplice in crime intended something of the kind, for after gazing up at the darkly scowling face for a moment, his own features livid with terror, the fellow slid down on his knees and set up such a wail of supplication as must have softened the heart of anybody who didn't happen to be acquainted with the bloody-handed house-burner and know that half of his lamentations were feigned to help him out of a tight place.

It is likely that Conroy himself viewed the matter in this light, for, after regarding the whining wretch with the utmost contempt for a second or two, he absolutely spat at him and turned his back.

After pacing the floor for some moments, during which the Jew, discovering that he was making no impression, and that, for the nonce, his head appeared to be in no imminent peril, had climbed slimily upon his chair again, Conroy turned, and, stopping before the still cringing fire-bug, resumed:

"As you did not choose to answer my question awhile ago, I now demand that my orders be carried out in this matter. You have posed thus far as the leader of this exemplary mob of yours; it shall be mine to lead in future!"

"Shoost as you say, Meester Gonroy," whined the Jew. "Vateffer you gommands s'all be garried oudt do der ledder. As you sugchest, in foocher you s'all pe der poss."

"That is satisfactory," said Conroy, shortly. "Not that there is anything worth feeling proud over being 'boss' of such a mob of cutthroats, but while one is in the depths, he might as well make the most of it. When are you going to do any more burning?"

"Vell, dere's a gouble off olt houzes yit on der liszt off inzured bropery, und I vas dinking dat iff efferyding vent vell, I vould set von off dem eider to-nidt or do-morrow nidt."

"What do you mean by saying that if everything went well?"

"I meant dat iff I s'ould vind you villing do raise der ber zent. vat I am allowt fer doing der peezeness."

"Which I have already told you I would not do. Now, how about the firing?"

The Jew shrugged his shoulders and grinned significantly, but catching a glimpse of Conroy's dark visage at that moment, the fellow appeared to lose the little courage he ever possessed, and meekly replied:

"Idt s'all pe do-morrow nidt, Meester Gonroy."

"Very well," rejoined the other brusquely. "Now leave me. I wish to be alone."

The Jew arose and sauntered slowly toward the door, with bent head, but before passing out he turned, looked back

and cast a look of such concentrated malignance at the insurance man, as to have made him quake if he had seen it; but, fortunately for the Jew, probably, Conroy did not see it, as he had already seated himself at the table and began to busy himself with some papers.

By the time the Jew was out of the door Sam had run round to head him off.

CHAPTER XV.

MET HIS MATCH AT LAST.

Sam stopped in his hasty progress from the ventilator to the door to speak to Mugsy and bid him follow.

He then dashed on, and reached the door almost as soon as Lazarus opened it.

The Jew was too much preoccupied to recognize the young detective at once, and would probably have walked on past him, had not Sam impeded his progress by stepping in front of him, and remarking:

"I say, me beut, yer ain't er goin' ter pass a ol' fren widout so much as tippin' de wink, is yer?"

"Go vay, poy!" growled the Jew, motioning Sam aside impatiently. "I don't vant to be pothered mit poys."

"Wal, I likes dat!" muttered Sam. "How's dat, Mug? Dis sheeny feader-bed scorchers calls me er kid! Wot d'yer t'ink o' dat?"

"Wot's dat?" asked Mugsy, coming up and shoving his chin into the fire-bug's face. "Wot's dat, Mister Laz'rus, de man wid biles?"

"W'y, his cinderlets says ter me, he says, 'Go vay, poy!' he says. Wot's ter be done wid er cove wot says dat ter er man o' my 'stinkshun, huh?"

All this time the Jew was using his best efforts to get by, and the boys were just as persistently preventing him by continually stepping in front of him.

Just at the point where Sam broke off, the fellow suddenly lost his patience, and fairly howled:

"Vill you git oudt off my vay, you wagaponds? Eef you don't, I veel gall der bolice!"

"Yep, dat wouldn't be er bad scheme," smiled Mugsy. "Dat'd save us de trubble o' callin' 'em, Sammy."

"Dat's so. But as I tooked de perkawshun ter perkure er warrant for dis young gentses arrest, I don't t'ink we'll need no p'leeceman. Wot d' youse t'ink, Lazy?"

"Vat's dat?" snarled the fellow.

"Oh, I t'ought I spoked plain nuff; but mebbly youse'd like ter have me speak in sheeny? If yer does, I kin tell yer now dat dat ain't in de line o' your'n trooly."

"I s'ould dink not!" chuckled the Jew sneeringly. "You don't vas gould spick dar Inclish lancvich, mooch less der bootiful glassical Hebrew. Vas?"

Sam flew into a towering passion in an instant, and Mugsy was nothing behind him in the matter of rage.

Both boys were done with joking from that moment, and the Jew had little to expect in the way of mercy at their hands.

With a sudden and lightning-like movement Sam clutched the fellow by the throat, and, as if by preconcerted arrangement, Mugsy grasped one of his arms and bent it so far behind his back as to render that member useless, and almost at the same instant Sam treated the other arm in a similar manner with his own other hand.

Thus the fire-bug was so securely pinioned that he was unable to move; and as for making an outcry, the clutch which Sam's vise-like right hand had on

his throat, precluded the possibility of that.

Sam then looked across at his chum, and, giving his head a peculiar jerk, said:

"In me coat pocket, Mug. Youse is got one han' syrplus, while bot' o' mine is occypied."

Mugsy was not slow in comprehending the apparently mysterious sign and words, and at once, still holding the miscreant with his right hand, fumbled in his friend's coat pocket with his left, and soon brought out a pair of handcuffs.

It did not take him the fraction of a second to snap one of the bracelets on the wrist of the arm he was holding, and not much longer to apply the other cuff to the one which Sam had secured.

The whole thing had been accomplished with such lightning expedition that the Jew, quick as he usually was at foreseeing calamity, was scarcely aware what was in store for him until it was all over.

Then, and not till then, did Sam release his death-like gripe on the firebug's windpipe.

"How d'yer feel now, sheeny?" asked Mugsy, tauntingly.

"Vot does dish means?" howled the Jew. "Dish vash an oudtrach! I vill der bollice gall!"

"Oh, yer needn't trubble yersef, Lazzy, ol' rocks!" sneered Mugsy. "We'll 'tend ter de p'leece-call."

"How tare you gommidt zuch an oudtrach on a beacable zitizen?"

"Oh, dat's nuttin'," answered Sam. "We doesn't mind er little t'ing like dat; its kinder in our line. But come on—no more foolin', as de ol' maid said ter de widderer w'en he wos a-holdin' back f'om 'posin'. Less git ter de Hotel Fallon afore all de choice rumes is took, kos I know me fren heer's uster good beddin' an' few bugs, 'cept fire-bugs."

"Lazzy don't min' dem er little bit, eh, Sammy?"

"Oh, he dotes on 'em. He rudder p'fers 'em to real decint folks, Lazzy does."

Sam and his chum undertook to get the Jew on the move, but he stood as stubborn as a mule.

"Oh, dat's yer game, is it?" muttered Sam, waxing furious. "Wal, I rudder t'ink I has er rem'dy fer balkin' hosses, eh, Mugsy?"

"I shud t'ink!"

With that Sam took out a coil of what appeared to be extremely fine steel wire.

Making a loop of it around the firebug's neck, he said:

"Now, Mug, youse git berhind an' steer, an' I reckon we'll fetch de colt er-long."

So saying, he closed up the loop on the creature's neck, walked ahead a yard, and began to pull.

Meanwhile Mugsy had placed himself behind the fellow and threw his weight against him.

A very little of this mode of locomotion was necessary to bring the stubborn Jew to terms, and he was soon ready and willing to walk along with the docility of a lamb.

Then came the jaunt down the long, unlighted stairs. But the journey was effected at last, and then when they had reached the street, for the first time did Lazarus think of asking Sam for his warrant.

"Heer 'tis, Lazzy, ol' barnickle," cried Sam, proudly, drawing the document forth and holding it in front of the helpless man's eyes. "Is dat erbout de caper?"

Lazarus had nothing more to say, and then, by way of doing things up "ter de

Queenses tas'," as Sam expressed it, instead of calling in the assistance of a policeman, or having a patrol-call sent in, the boy must needs call a cab which happened to be passing, and in this respectable vehicle, he had himself, his chum and the prisoner driven to the Tombs prison.

"Yer see," he commented, "I allus likes ter do de genteel t'ing wid critters wot appears like gents. Not dat I wud insinerate fer er minit dat youse is er gent, Lazzy; fer frum it. I wouldn't dislokate an' exposchewlate de name o' gent wid callin' youse one—not fer fun. I knows too much erbout de pore laws o' Brooklyn fer dat. So, yer see, aldough yer ain't no gent, but looks like one w'en yer has on yer Saturday close, jes' as er mule looks like er hoss, but ain't no hoss, I's a-goin' ter give yer a comferble ride fer de las' time, till yer takes de Black M'riar fer yer noo home up de rivver. See?"

After a short silence, Sam resumed:

"I say, Lazzy, wot's de name an' 'dress o' dat chum o' your'n wot yer wos sayin' yer pray'rs ter, down dair in de office?"

This question gave the Jew an unpleasant start.

It did not seem possible to him that any living being could have seen or heard what passed in that office.

So, in lieu of answering, the fellow stared at Sam as if he thought him some supernatural being.

"Wal, air yer a-goin' ter spiel?" roared the boy, "er der yer want me ter try de p'swader on yer lyin' t'roat ag'in?"

The recollection of the steel-wire "persuader," as Sam had named it, was sufficient to open the Jew's lips, and he answered in a dogged spirit:

"You mean dat dirdty, mean schamp vat I dalks do by der offis, already?"

"Yep; sumpin' like yersef, on'y I don't t'ink dat chap'd git down on his knees ter youse, unless he wos awful drunk er loony. But, if he would do sich er t'ing, w'y den I say he is mean—almos' as mean as youse. But yer hasn't tol' me wot de party's name an' 'dress is, Lazzy, ol' bones."

After a good deal of dallying and bickering, the Jew finally made out to give Sam his confederate's name and address.

"But," supplemented Lazarus, "eef ye wants do arrest dat veller, und you vill pe purty quivick, dere vill pe no use off knowing his attress, vor he vill propably remain in der office more as halef de nidt, already."

"Tanks, Lazzy," said Sam, with mock gratitude. "Youse is not half so bad er feller as de perleece gen'rally t'inks yer air. Now, jes kin'ly interrogate me wot pertickler c'neckshun his padlets had wid de house-buridin' eendustry."

Here followed a long and tedious series of bickerings again; but in the end Sam gleaned that the man Conroy was simply the rate-fixer, or the man who decides what a piece of property is to be insured at, of a legitimate insurance company, and at the same time was connected with this gang of fire-bugs, and fixed matters with the company after a building had been destroyed by his confederates, and then took his share of the profits.

It seemed, also, that Lazarus had some hold on the man through a guilty knowledge of some unlawful transaction which, if correctly located, would have sent Conroy to the State's Prison for a long term of years. And thus it was important that he should purchase the Jew's silence at any cost.

After turning his prisoner over to the proper authorities at the Tombs, Sam, through his acquaintance with a justice,

secured a warrant for Conroy, and within an hour afterward, with assistance of two policemen, turned the lock on the go-between Conroy.

In due course the two men, as well as the fire-bugs which Sam had been the means of having run in, were tried, and received such sentences as their respective degrees of guilt seemed to judge and jury to warrant.

As for Lazarus, it being proven that he was directly guilty of murder, he received a life sentence, and a speech from the judge, in which the official offered the criminal the consoling assurance that he was heartily sorry that it was not within his power to send the culprit to the electric chair.

And lastly, but not leastly, we come to Scaler Sam and his life-long chum, Mugsy.

Sam, for his part, received a handsome reward from the underwriters and an additional one from the city, both of which he divided generously with his chum.

"Dat cleers de deck," observed Sam, when everything had been settled; "but after all, it leaves er kinder of er hanker-in', like as if I'd et de las' cake, an' was still hungry."

THE END.

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